

ActNow! (Applying Christ's Teaching NOW) follows the weekly sermon series of TPMC, and challenges us to apply and put into practice the biblical truths we hear each week. It is the recommended Bible discussion material for TPMC's Connect Groups, and leader's notes are available to all Connect Group Leaders and at the Information Counter.

Sermon on the Mount: What Did Jesus Say About Divorce and Oaths?

Matthew 5:31-37
Rev Benjamin Lee

SERMON SYNOPSIS

- Although we read of fairytales of “Living happily ever after”, unfortunately in life, we have struggles in our marriages and some end in divorce. Jesus’ teaching about divorce in Matthew 5:31-32 is expanded in Matthew 19:3-9. There were two schools of thought being taught by the Rabbis (religious leaders) in Jesus’ time. The first by Rabbi Shammai held that the laws around divorce were very strict, and that the sole ground for divorce was a grave matrimonial offence. The second by Rabbi Hillel was more permissive, allowing a man to divorce his wife for almost any reason, and this was the view that was more common in Jewish society at that point in time. The Pharisees were in essence asking Jesus which school of thought Jesus was taking.
- Jesus referred to the original intent for marriage, that God intended for husband and wife to be joined together in one flesh, and that man should not simply separate what God has joined together. Jesus was more concerned with a married couple finding reasons to stay together rather than reasons for being apart. The pharisees called Moses’ instruction on divorce a command, but Jesus frames it differently as a concession for their hardness of heart instead. Again, Jesus was pointing towards God’s original intention.
- The second topic Jesus spoke about in this passage is about oaths. The Pharisees were teaching that people should not swear falsely, but Jesus was teaching His disciples not to swear at all. In Matthew 23:16-22, Jesus expands on this teaching. The Pharisees were developing different rules about what kinds of oaths were binding, and which were not. They were looking for ways out to not keep their promises. Jesus was saying that everything ultimately points to God, whether the temple, the gold or even our own head, because God created it. So, all oaths would be binding, and we should not need to swear any oaths at all.
- This has two applications. In our marriages, we should look for reasons to continue to stay in, rather than get out. It is easy to see the flaws in one another, but we are encouraged to look for the positives that will draw us together and enable us to keep our marriage vows. In the things we say, we should keep our promises. We should do what we say we will do, not be flippant with our words, but be trustworthy so that people will trust what we say when we testify to God’s goodness, faithfulness and love.
- Even though oaths and marriages are broken, we have the assurance in Jesus Christ, our Prince of Peace. He is faithful and keeps all His promises, never leaving nor forsaking us. He demonstrated His faithfulness and trustworthiness when He gave His life for us.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

RELATE

1. What do you think about taking oaths? Do you ever find yourself having to appeal to a higher authority to make people believe what you are saying?

REFLECT

2. As Christians, how are we called to approach the challenges that we have in marriage or in keeping our promises and word?

[Verses to help us go deeper: Mark 10:45; Ephesians 5:20-28; Ecclesiastes 5:4-5]

RESPOND

3. As disciples of Jesus, how does He enable us to keep our word?

[Verses to help us go deeper: Psalm 51:6; Philippians 2:12-13; Galatians 2:20]

PRAYER POINTERS

- Praise God for the grace that we have through faith in Jesus, who enables us to stay in our marriage relationships and to keep our promises.
- Pray for the grace to be strong in times of temptation that will come our way, to stand firm in the face of the evil one.
- Pray for brothers and sisters in Christ who are struggling in their marriages, that they will be able to come to a resolution that enables God to be glorified and their needs to be satisfied.

SCRIPTURE TO MEDITATE ON

"But make sure your statement is, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil origin."
[Matthew 5:37, NASB2020]