

# Commitment in Marriage, Integrity in Speech: Of Such is the Kingdom of Heaven

Matthew 5:31-37

Joe Bartemus

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## INTRODUCTION

We are continuing our series in the gospel according to Matthew. We are in the section called the Sermon on the Mount. Pastor Mark has entitled this Sermon on the Mount "Get Real". Among a number of other agendas, the sermon has a significant issue against superficial religion. Jesus and his kingdom will not tolerate superficial participation. The sermon starts with the beatitudes. Dallas Willard summarizes them with this sentence: "Blessed are the spiritual zero's, spiritually bankrupt, deprived, and deficient...theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Kingdom people do not see themselves as the focus of the kingdom, rather—Jesus is. It is about Him not them. Matthew 5:20 summarizes it well in saying that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, they would not enter the kingdom of heaven. Righteousness goes beyond mere superficial external acts to the heart. Jesus wants real people in his kingdom, who find real life in Him.

The section we are currently studying sets up some situations (or tests) to help one to determine the sincerity of one's faith. Jesus in good rabbinic style sets up 6 situations and contrasts the current perspective of the day, with the radical reality of his kingdom. This morning we will look at 2 of the antitheses. The relevance of the sermon for us today is amazing. Let's carefully look at these tests and evaluate our hearts and see our ratio of superficiality to reality in our Christian faith. This issue of authenticity vs. superficiality reminds me of a classic TV program called "Leave it to Beaver". The Cleaver family was the "perfect family of the 1950's. They had a friend called Eddie Haskell. He was the ultimate superficial person. He would come in and compliment Mrs. Cleaver tell her how nice her hair was and her house and her cooking, all the while having no real interest in those items at all. At times it seems like our Christianity can have a Eddie Haskell appearance. No more Eddie Haskell Christianity. WE need authentic Christianity –Real relationship with our triune God and with each other. Let's look at these 2 test this morning and pray for God's grace to help us to move from superficiality to reality.

### **I. Test #1: Authentic, committed marriages (and relationships) vs. superficial disposable marriages (5:31-32)**

Verse 31 begins with the clause "It was said, whoever divorces his wife. Let him give her a certificate of divorce. Jesus is quoting Deut. 24:1-4. Moses discusses divorce. Due to the hardness of their hearts, Moses allowed for divorce in the case of sexual infidelity but, they should issue a bill of divorce so the woman could prove her status for future marriage. The Jewish teachers wrestled with this short statement and tried to determine when to divorce. The debates of the rabbis were put into writing after the time of Jesus in the Mishna. Their debates were quite interesting and often contrary to the kingdom of God's heaven. There is a whole tract on divorce in the Mishna which is 55 pages long in my edition. Most of that tract is on how to write a bill of divorcement. The rabbis said you could write a divorce bill

on a cow's horn, but not on a living creature. At the end of that tract on divorce, the Mishna records the rabbinical debate concerning grounds.

There were 3 schools of thought. Shammai said that divorce was only allowed for unfaithfulness (some put a lot of content in that nuance, but the main area of unfaithfulness as sexual). Hillel was the liberal and said you could divorce a wife for almost anything even burning a meal. Finally the most radical was Akiba who said if you were attracted to another woman, you could divorce. As we look at these debates, we think of it as absurd, but I think if we looked at the section on divorce in Border's Book store, we could believe it would shock the Pharisees of Jesus' time. These words show the superficiality of the religious elite in Jesus time. They spent most of their time on the discussion of dissolution of marriage and not on the permanence of marriage. Even the school of Shammai, was mostly concerned with to get out of marriage rather than how to make it work.

Jesus responds in elegant and official verbiage as he then says—BUT I say. Obviously whenever the word "but" appears it is huge. Jesus is saying your culture argues one way—BUT—my kingdom is not like that. The kingdom of heaven is all about Jesus and what he says. The Greek word for I SAY is a catchy phrase that is pronounced "EGO LEGO." The literal translation of it is "I MYSELF say". I am talking and when I talk the whole cosmos needs to stand up and respond. The cultural messages are totally irrelevant when put against the word of Jesus. This clause is the key to the sermon. Jesus wants us to relate to him and we do it on his terms and through his words.

Jesus then goes on to say in very brief but profound fashion that whoever divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery and whoever marries her commits adultery. In the ancient world, women virtually never divorced men. When a man divorced a pure wife, her hope for survival most likely was to remarry. Jesus said that was adultery and caused mostly by the man. This is a huge deal and in light of the previous section in the Sermon on the Mount, as well as the OT law—no one wants to be committing adultery. It technically should result in stoning and is a clear violation of the 10 Commandments. Jesus is saying that you are playing with fire as you play with marriage dissolution. Marriage is a sacred covenant and commitment of the lives of 2 people to the triune God who will never be dissolved. Jesus says, rather than fight over the grounds for divorce, realize the implications of a superficial view of this core relationship that reflects God. It is a horrible representation of his kingdom.

I obviously skipped a short little clause that is not the main point of Jesus. The phrase is "except on the grounds of sexual immorality". This short clause is based on Deut. 24 and has been a great source of debate in evangelical Christianity. Let's look at it carefully and I will express my best read of this text. Some who agree with me are Jay Adams, John Murray, John McArthur. One notable one who reads it differently is John Piper. The first word in the clause is the word "except". It is usually used to express an exception to what is stated. It seems rather straightforward, but the tension is that Jesus is arguing for the permanence of marriage so how could there be an exception. Some say it refers only to the betrothal time period and other say it could mean "not even". I think the clearest and simplest reading is to take it as a true exception. The exception follows and is translated many ways The ESV says "on the grounds of sexual immorality". That seems to be a good translation. The word is pornea and the major NT Greek lexicon (dictionary) gives as its meaning—"various sexual deviations including marital infidelity". The clearest read of the text in this context seems to be that sexual immorality is devastating to marriage and could be a basis for its destruction. Blomberg says "sexual immorality breaks the marriage covenant and may be a sign of the death of the marriage". Those are scary and sobering words. The Westminster

Confession of Faith says “In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for...a divorce and to remarry another as if the offending party were dead”. The confession goes on to hear the heart of Jesus as the writers say “the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder what God has joined together in marriage.” The point of the exception clause is to deal with reality in a sinful world, but definitely not to be the norm. Permanence and forgiveness are to be the norm in God’s kingdom, but there are times when the reality of sin destroys the permanence and kills the marriage. What a horrible death.

The exception is real as I understand it, but is not to be the focus. It makes me think of our time at the beach last week. We went to Myrtle Beach with a billion other people (or so). There were lifeguards who have this little flag that says it is ok to go in and swim. We just go in the water and enjoy the beautiful ocean that God created. There is an exception to when you can go in the water. Everyone knows that if there is a shark in the water, that is an exception—do not go swimming. There was a day when the life guards pulled us out of the water and we all like good Pharisees debated if there was really a shark there. How close does the shark need to be to cause us to dessert the ocean. I think it was a dolphin, but no one needs to tell me of that exception. I think Jesus was tired of all the debate over the grounds of divorce and he said simply—DO NOT DIVORCE. Get REAL!!!!

**Application:**

There are some major themes explicit in this text. For those of us who are single and think there is no relevance from this text, Jesus takes the focal relationship of human life and uses it to show relationships in his kingdom that are not superficial.

**First**, we should not live our lives based on the current trends of society in regards to relationships but as members of His kingdom, his word becomes our life and sustenance. When the TV and internet emphasize how disposable marriage is. When our sports heroes are immoral, when being in love is the law of relationships, we of His kingdom turn a deaf ear. We rather listen to EGO LEGO (I Say).. We live in a great country and I love July 4<sup>th</sup> and what it stands for—but it has led to a nation of those who know nothing of kingdom and see our individual rights as the bottom line. Our society is not even sure how to define marriage.

**Secondly**, Jesus’ kingdom is made up of committed relationships. That is mainly seen in marriage, but should also be seen in our church assemblies and in relative relationships. It is easy to look for reasons to break down relationships –Uncle Henry is a pain, so no one talks to him. My roommate is intolerable and I want out. I do not like the fill in pastors who preach at CPC so I am leaving. Or—perish the thought—I am dissatisfied with my spouse and know there is someone better for me—so I am going to jump out of it. Jesus says—GET REAL—Look at me and learn of commitment and do likewise.

**Third**, you may think your actions only affect you, but wake up—get real. When you divorce and break off relationships, you are doing something that God did not create us to do and the danger is great. You will become a bitter, intolerant, selfish person—totally unlike the Father, Son, and Spirit and could even go so far as to cause another person to come under the death sentence of God. Yes, think of the kids, the church, the community. Adultery devastates the norms of the kingdom.

Here are some concluding pastoral remarks to CPC and our quest to be a kingdom living church:

**1. To the married:**

Marriage is sacred and holy. I have done a number of weddings and they all start with hope and without exceptions. Superficial Christianity will lead to superficial marriages. Get rid of superficiality—Get Christ into the reality of your life and watch what happens to your marriage. How do you do that? Get on your knees and pray that God will give you a true heart to love him—then you can love your spouse. Get into his Word and let him speak (EGO LEGO). Start with the Sermon on the Mount, then go to Ephesians 4 and 5. Go to Equipping the Saints to see how you and be live in relationship like kingdom like kingdom people. Read Sacred Marriage by Gary Thomas who says that marriage is intended to make you holy NOT happy.

Kids, tell you parents that for Christmas you want Mommy and Daddy to love each other and give you a secure foundation for living and they can keep he IPods, legos and whatever else is “in”.

Let's be a church who encourages permanence in marriages. I have heard people say that they have 2 choices, live in a terrible marriage or divorce. Let's encourage the 3<sup>rd</sup> and better option—work for a good marriage.

## **2. To the singles**

If considering marriage, get your heart right with God and only marry a believer. Work on other relationships to be a kingdom person whether married or not. Work to develop diverse relationships. Encourage married people in kingdom relationships.

## **3. To the sexually unfaithful**

Sexual infidelity is superficial sexuality and relationships. Superficial sexuality is a good sign of superficial Christianity. At stake is your relationships and your eternal life. Heaven is all about relationships and it is more real than our façades on earth. The exception clause certainly argues for some potential huge judgment for the sexually immoral. Sometimes I think the judgment is to be consumed by your lust. It can destroy your marriage and your soul. Repent and be Real!!!!

## **4. To the divorced**

I can relate to you. I have been there and as I read the Bible I think I fit the Biblical grounds for divorce. I remember the day when the judge said the marriage would be dissolved and I said I was opposed to the divorce and she said, you have no choice and dropped the gavel and it was formal. That is one of the most horrible things in the ordered world of God. To those with a history of divorce—there is healing in Christ's atonement. If you sinned in your divorce, repent and work toward reconciliation as much as is possible. Commit yourself to kingdom relationships and to living for Jesus—that is reality. Those who are on the brink of divorce—Do not do it. In counseling here we have seen great restorations of marriages that looked dead. It takes 2 to fully restore a marriage (with the help of the Holy Spirit), but one can work hard and influence the other in wonderful ways. Divorce is only a last resort. There must be absolutely no other recourse. Is if possible?, yes-- but only as a last resort.. If it does happen, find you solace in Jesus first and then in his church.

## **II. Test #2—Authentic lives of integrity vs. superficial lives that are facades and dishonest (5:33-37)**

Jesus now moves to another topic or test of authenticity. These 6 antitheses all relate. Jesus is now going to speak of integrity or faithfulness. He says “you have heard it said do not swear falsely. Again,

he is going after their rabbinic tradition. There are several sections in the Mishna that speak to the issue of oaths. There was debate over how to formulate them. The essence of these oaths was to invoke the wrath of God to avenge his honor when one swears on God's character and does not keep his oath. It is like our custom of swearing on the Bible or saying "cross my heart, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye". Then when we lie we say "I had my fingers crossed". We are following good rabbinic style. Jesus then drops the bomb—"EGO LEGO." But I say. That is all that matters.

Jesus says do not take an oath by heaven or earth or Jerusalem or by your head. All these areas are areas where God is ruler. He finishes the statement with the positive statement that our Yes should be Yes and our No should be No. Anything else is a lie and is from evil (or the evil one). It is not stated to be a prohibition against any swearing or oaths. It was a statement of God's kingdom where the people of that kingdom keep their word and do not need to call an avenging deity to affirm their integrity.

In a similar manner, this antithetical statement fits into the others. Kingdom people do not hate, do not lust, do not divorce and do not lie. They do not play games, but are committed to love, self sacrifice, commitment and integrity. That is all because of the reality of the king of the kingdom, Jesus. Their lives reflect Him and are empowered by Him. In this section on authentic lives of integrity, there are some clear principles.

**First**, the call is to be authentic and not duplicitous in our lives and words. The nuance of duplicity is that we need something to affirm our integrity—more than our word. We can be known as a person who cannot always be trusted and lives two lives.

**Second**, Jesus wants us to be people of our word and ones who can be counted on no matter what. That is the way He is. He is totally trustworthy. We need to be likewise. Our word must always be good.

#### **APPLICATION:**

1. Be careful little tongue what you say. Do not get caught up in the lie of "white lies". Tell the truth even in small things. We teach our kids to do that and we should as well. I remember a story of a man who was interviewing for a job and was taken to lunch to a cafeteria. At the end of the line there were pads of butter for the bread which cost 5 cents each. He took 2 and hid them under his plate. The interviewer saw that small action and did not offer him the job. He said that if he could not be honest with 5 cent items how could he be trusted with million dollar items.

2. Do not talk one way and live another. Many are good at putting on the façade of Christianity and then going home and to work and living totally contrary to their Sunday actions. Never allow that to happen. Live a life of consistency. That is what God calls his people to do. When I think of integrity, I think of many in CPC. I also think of my brother, Don. He keeps his word. I remember when we were little, in elementary school. My Dad's boss came over for dinner. We were prepared with the admonition to be on our best behavior since Mr. Laffler may not be a Christian. Don prayed for the meal and thanked God for the food and also mentioned that we knew that Mr. Laffler was not a Christian and asked the Lord to bring him to faith. It was an awkward moment, but one that shows that true integrity can be difficult, but of such is the kingdom of heaven.

## **CONCLUSION:**

CPC, it is time to get real. We need to get rid of Eddie Haskel Christianity. The Sermon on the Mount is hard hitting. Jesus does not cover every aspect of kingdom living, but he gives enough to tell us how much we need him. We need to get our relationships right to glorify Him and because we are rightly related to him. This last week we went to Myrtle Beach. When we all arrived there were 10 of us—my wife, 3 kids, 2 spouses, a brother and sister in law and a niece. There is a lot of shallow façade stuff at Myrtle Beach, but my favorite times were when we had 10 chairs right by the ocean with our feet in the water talking about life in the kingdom with the people we love. The ocean was doing what God created it to do, the sky was wonderful, the tranquility was restful and all was right. We did miss some people so it was not perfect, but it reminded me that the important realities of life are not I Phones, and computers but relationships. God made us to live in committed relationships of integrity. We need to be committed to Jesus and his people and our spouses and our families and our neighbors and then we need to be people of integrity in relation to them as well. May we as a church pursue God with our marriages and our integrity and look for the day when Myrtle Beach will be but a fading memory as we engage in the fully realized kingdom of God.

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