



## ***Sexual Ethics- Part 1***

- I. Introduction. We live in a post-Christian culture that denies absolute standards and promotes selfish fulfillment at the expense of relational integrity and internal peace. As believers, we must navigate purity in a world that no longer values sexual integrity.
  
- II. Cultural Context of the First Century
  - A. In the Roman Empire, it was common for a man to have a wife, a mistress, and a concubine (usually one of his slaves). There were also prostitutes readily available for any need a man might have. Demosthenes from Athens stated this clearly, “We keep mistresses for pleasure, concubines for day to day bodily needs, but we have wives to produce legitimate children and serve as guardians of our homes.” This was the worldly mindset of that day. Imagine the shock when someone became a Christian and was asked to be sexually monogamous. There was also a fair amount of homosexual activity in the Roman Empire, specifically in cult worship to pagan idols. How does sexuality in our culture compare to the Roman Empire in the first century?
  
  - B. Jewish culture was completely different. The religious leaders promoted monogamy in marriage and opposed all homosexual activity, but privately many men had a concubine or mistress. There were very few singles in Jewish culture.
  
- III. Biblical Teaching on Sexuality
  - A. The definition and sanctity of marriage- Matthew 19:3-12. In Jewish culture, the Rabbis interpreted the law in such a way that made it easy to divorce. The law of Moses said that in order to divorce a woman, a man must give her a certificate of divorce to free her up to marry again. God set the divorce laws up in Israel to protect women. Men would spite their wives by “putting them away” and refusing to give them a certificate of divorce. The women were left to prostitution or begging in order to survive. There was great controversy among the Rabbinic leaders about what constituted a divorce. Shammai interpreted the law to say that the only reason a man could divorce is for sexual sin. Hillel interpreted the law to mean that a man could divorce his wife for any displeasure. They questioned Jesus on this issue to trap him and undermine his credibility. Following is Jesus’ response:
    1. He defined marriage- Jesus defined marriage as a sacred union between a man and a woman. He defined marriage by going back to God’s intent at creation. When we define something, we limit its definition by what we include and exclude (recipe, doctor’s prescription, engineer specs). In defining marriage, Jesus included man and woman, which excluded all other unions as illegitimate. Jesus addressed homosexual unions through defining what is acceptable marriage. How do we

define marriage in culture today? How does it differ from Jesus' definition of marriage? What do you think are the consequences of defining marriage differently than God's definition?

2. He sanctified marriage- Marriage is a holy union brought together by God; man cannot separate it. It is the only relationship on earth called a covenant, and its importance is magnified through being compared to Christ and the church. Jesus said that marriage is more important than blood relationships. The heart of God is that marriage would never be broken, but what he teaches about divorce in this passage is not how the church has interpreted the text over its history.
  - a. There are two Greek words associated with divorce in this passage. Apolusai- to release, dismiss, or send away. This is a reference to sending her away without a certificate of divorce. Stasiou- to divorce. Matthew 19:3, 7-10:
  - b. "Is it lawful for a man to apolusai (dismiss) his wife for any cause at all?" "Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of stasiou (divorce) and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Because of the hardness of your heart, Moses permitted you to apolusai (dismiss) your wives. Whoever apolusai (dismiss) his wife except for immorality and marries another commits adultery."
  - c. Jesus upholds the sanctity of marriage, but his instruction on adultery is limited to men who refuse to give their wives a certificate of divorce. The application for today is that if people divorce, they are free to remarry.
  - d. What does it mean that marriage is a covenant? How is marriage different from every other earthly relationship? What is God's heart for marriage? Based on Jesus' words in this text, what is God's heart toward divorce? What should be our attitude toward marriage and divorce as followers of Christ?
  
3. He addressed singles- A eunuch was a man who was castrated and therefore could not have sex. He would live celibate. There are three kinds of eunuchs according to Jesus- those who were born that way, those who chose to become a eunuch for their career (they were usually slaves who attended the harem for a wealthy man), and those who chose that lifestyle for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Each one chose celibacy as a way of life. Singles choose celibacy for Jesus' sake. What does this teaching reveal to us about God's desire for the sexual practices of single adults? How can we live out this truth in a sexually charged culture like America? What do you think are some cultural consequences for ignoring the will of God in the area of sexuality? What is your takeaway from this study?

