

Marriage-Divorce-Remarriage: A Review #1

Jesus Explained Moses' Law

Perhaps, the best way to introduce this review or restudy is to ask some questions. Jesus gave instructions on the subject recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Later, Paul offered less restrictive teachings to the Corinthians than Jesus had taught. Paul did not suggest that they restudy Jesus' teachings concerning divorce and remarriage, nor did he even mention adultery. Would the Corinthians have sinned in following Paul's teachings which differed from, and did not include, those given by Jesus?

The first response may be that Paul was building on to what Jesus had taught. That would be an assumption at best. By a letter, the Corinthians had asked Paul some questions relating to marriage. Why did not Paul begin his response by telling them to read Jesus' teaching in the gospels to learn their answers? Many scholars date the gospels a decade or more after Paul's letter. Others rightly date them earlier but allowing little time for them to circulate into Greece. The fuller account of Jesus' teachings concerning marriage was written by Matthew for the Jews particularly. Possibly, Paul had not read it and it had not reached Corinth. However, Paul did make one reference to the teaching of "the Lord" possibly referring to Mark 10:11 but his application of it is somewhat ambivalent (1 Cor. 7:10). He had received his message by revelation rather than from other inspired writers (Gal. 1:11-24), and his message differed from the gospels on some significant points. Were the disciples safe in following Paul's teaching?

Jesus' teaching about marriage was to the Jews. He set forth no new laws but was explaining the true meaning of the Law of Moses on the subject in contrast to the traditions of the fathers – "*You have heard that it was said . . .*" While Jesus explained the Law, Paul set forth principles of grace instead of legalities. Many of our confused and perplexing answers have been because we tried to mix the Law of Moses and the grace of Christ.

Early in his ministry Jesus warned, "*Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets,*" but in the very next paragraph we have generally explained that Jesus was setting forth his new teachings which, in effect, would be abolishing the Law by changing it authoritatively! In the second and third paragraphs, we have him giving new regulations concerning adultery, divorce, and marriage! Due to our preconceived notions, we have flatly contradicted what Jesus taught a few lines earlier! Friends and neighbors, boys and girls, that ain't too smart!

Why was Jesus explaining the Law of Moses when the cross was so near? It was because the Jews would be given a period of about forty years in which to make the complete transition from the Law to grace. Law keeping would extend into the kingdom of heaven during a time of overlapping of the covenants. God did not demand an instant change for it would require years for his message to reach all those who served him. Jesus explained, "*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world,*

as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14). To accomplish this Jesus gave the “Great Commission” to the eleven apostles, promising, “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20). That coming “end” would be the dissolution of their whole system.

For emphasis, let me again repeat this much-misunderstood passage: *“Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till HEAVEN AND EARTH PASS AWAY, not one iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then RELAXES one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who DOES them and TEACHES them shall be called great IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN” (Matt. 5:17-19).*

As the coming of the Lord (parousia) drew near about thirty-five years later, it was written, *“In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and is growing old is ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8:13). That system was the “heaven and earth” that would pass away when the Law reached fulfillment. At the end of the age rather than at the cross or Pentecost, John saw “a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.. .” (Rev. 21:1). That was the new order in which we now live succeeding the old order which was fulfilled. To deny that this transpired at the parousia is to contradict Jesus and/or to affirm that the law has not been fulfilled and has not passed away yet! Why try to evade this truth in order to sustain traditional misunderstandings?*

The context of Jesus’ statements must be respected. They were not addressed to Gentiles for the law was not given to them. Hence, Jesus’ teachings concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage explaining the Law of Moses were never meant for Gentiles then or now.

Some of the thoughts being presented here are repetitious for I have used them in recent essays. I repeat and enlarge on them here in order to relate them to the specific point of study of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Scan the Sermon on the Mount again and see how many topics of the Law he was discussing with Jews rather than giving new laws for us today. It is astounding how we have been so misdirected traditionally.

In this quotation in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was addressing Jews who were living under a combined civil-religious government required by the Law. It was administered by the Levites with added civil laws by Rome. Jewish culture was built around this “church-state” arrangement. Was this system outlawed the day after the crucifixion? Were all Jews throughout the empire in sin who continued to keep their Law the day after Pentecost? Did they sin by continuing their tithe tax supporting the civil-religious system? Such a system and culture could not be changed overnight. Jesus’ crucifixion did not nullify the civil laws imposed on Israel in the Law of Moses!

Were disciples in error for continuing to circumcise their sons, for refusing to eat pork, for being cautious to leave the gleanings when reaping, for women to refuse to wear men’s clothing and visa-versa, for abstaining from eating blood, for demanding a multiplicity of witnesses in trials, and for not mixing breeds of cattle, the seeds in their fields, and fabrics in their clothing? Since the Law contained civil regulations as well as

religious, were the disciples suddenly without civil law after Pentecost? The gospel of salvation was preached on Pentecost but the gospel imposed no civil regulations.

The Jerusalem conference (Acts 15) forbade the BINDING of circumcision on Gentiles, but there was no indication that Jewish believers should forsake it. After that, Paul circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3). On his last trip to Jerusalem he “*cut his hair, for he had a vow*” (Acts 18:18). During this period Judean disciples continued to keep the law (Acts 21:17-26), but they were not doing it as a means of justification. Paul was adamant that no one could look to the Law for salvation for that would have made Christ’s role unnecessary. That would make salvation by law instead of grace. But law-keeping as a matter of devotion, respect for their heritage, and obeying civil regulations was not forbidden. In fact, Jesus had urged that very thing in his sermon on the mountain.

Paul argued that keeping of days, food regulations, and circumcision were matters of indifference as far as salvation and fellowship were concerned (Rom. 14; Gal. 5:6; 1 Cor. 8:8; etc.). But he would permit no thought of salvation through the keeping of those things. Disciples today may circumcise, tithe, and observe special days and food restrictions if they do not look upon them as necessary to their salvation. Many of their governmental regulations were in the same category as those of our government. We sin if we refuse to pay taxes, ignore traffic regulations, or violate laws pertaining to business. But if we keep all those things perfectly, we still cannot claim salvation through them. Law can bring sin but it cannot offer salvation.

There are many other contextual passages relating to this subject which you may wish to study. I am going to work to make these lessons brief rather than flooding your carburetor with more information than is needed. Exciting concepts are ahead as we look again at Paul’s teaching about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. []

(Cecil Hook: March 2006)

GOOD NEWS!! The topical INDEX to all “Freedom’s Ring” articles has been updated through FR 305. That didn’t just happen. It is the fruitful work of Vic Phares, of Shreveport, Louisiana, who created and has maintained the web site from its beginning. Without his continuous work, this outreach would be non-existent. As it is, in just the last twelve months, there were 2,130,824 hits at the site! In February alone the site received 142,371 hits. That is due to Vic’s unselfish labor with the help of the Lord.

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At the web page you may click on a picture of Vic with Lea and me taken about ten years ago. []