

# END-TIMES ISSUES

**#115** Commandment #7 – Divorce issues (3); its ultimate cause.

1

## AN OVERVIEW OF WHAT WE'VE ALREADY STUDIED:

- **The Old Testament Law doesn't punish divorce.**
  - ✓ It's a destructive act of violence that God hates.
  - ✓ Yet when we look in the Law, where we might have expected to find punishments for divorcing a spouse, *we don't find any.*
- **What the Law does do.**
  - ✓ The regulations seem more like "damage control," than punishments.
  - ✓ We find regulations that *limit* it, yet which appear to *permit* it.
  - ✓ We also find regulations that would protect the woman (who would have been most vulnerable in a divorce situation), *even though* (at times) *she may have been the reason for it.*
- **Why?**
  - ✓ Divorce is just a symptom of a *deeper* issue; and it's the deeper issue that needs dealt with. On this level, there are often times when *both* partners have contributed to the problem.

2

- **Jesus says the whole concept of divorce goes against what God designed marriage to be.**
  - ✓ When Jesus stated this fact, the religious leaders asked, "Why did God permit it?" We would have probably asked the same!
  - ✓ Jesus answered their question— and it was an answer they *did not* want to hear. (Quite likely, many people today would not want to hear it, either.)
- **The real issue, according to Jesus, is not divorce, but hardness of heart.** This is something that *either* individual (or both) can have.

Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because of your **hardness of heart**; but it was not this way from the beginning."  
Matthew 19:8 (BSB)

But Jesus told them, "Moses wrote this commandment for you because of your **hardness of heart**."  
Mark 10:5 (BSB)

3

## SO WHAT EXACTLY IS THIS "HARD HEART"?

- **Where this word came from:** (It's *one* word in the N.T. Greek.)
  - ✓ It represents an Old Testament concept.
  - ✓ The word Jesus used originated in the Greek *translation* of the Old Testament (also called the Septuagint, or abbreviated as "LXX").
- **This was a new word that was formed for a special purpose.**
  - ✓ In Deuteronomy 10:16, the translators came across a concept, which, if *literally* translated, would not have been understood by the Greek audience.
  - ✓ There was no appropriate Greek word to communicate the *meaning* of the literal Hebrew words. So, they combined two already-existing words to form a new one – which, centuries later, Jesus would use in his explanation of the divorce issue.
  - ✓ These two already-existing Greek words were "hard" and "heart" – which were then combined to form a *new* word that had a special meaning.

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- **What is this "hardness of heart"?**
  - ✓ The Greek word "sklerokardia" (σκληροκαρδία).
  - ✓ It refers to an obstinate and stubborn attitude that is unresponsive to God; a heart that is hard, cold, completely unyielding, and unwilling to be taught or to understand. [This definition is based on several N.T. Greek dictionaries.]
  - ✓ This new word was used when translating Deuteronomy 10:16 and Jeremiah 4:4. It was used to describe the *spiritual meaning* of the *physical* act of circumcision. The Jews understood this concept; but most Gentiles wouldn't.

**The verses where this "hard heart" concept is found:** →

**Circumcision** – a *sign*; a reminder of God's promise to Abraham, and of Abraham's trust in the God who made the promise. It's also a reminder of *everyone's* need to have this same kind of trust in God. The *physical* act symbolized what needs to be done in the *heart*.

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- **Translation of these verses – original Hebrew vs. Greek translation.** (Jesus used the word found in the Greek translation, because it *accurately* communicated the Hebrew concept.)
- ✓ **Deuteronomy 10:16:**

<b>FROM THE ORIGINAL HEBREW:</b>	Circumcise therefore <b>the foreskin of your heart</b> , and be no longer stubborn. Deuteronomy 10:16 (ESV)
<b>FROM THE GREEK (LXX) TRANSLATION:</b>	And you shall circumcise <b>your hardness of heart,*</b> and you shall not harden your neck. Deuteronomy 10:16 (LES)
- » The footnote explains why they translated it this way:
 

\* FOOTNOTE: The LXX translator understood the moral dimension of this metaphor and omitted the reference to the "foreskin of the heart" as is found in Heb.
- » Some English translations, following the example of the LXX, focus on the *meaning*, instead of the original Hebrew words: circumcise your hearts, change your hearts, cleanse your heart.

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✓ **Jeremiah 4:4:**

**FROM THE ORIGINAL HEBREW:**

"Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove **the foreskin of your hearts**, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds."  
Jeremiah 4:4 (ESV)

**FROM THE GREEK (LXX) TRANSLATION:**

Circumcise yourselves to God, and circumcise **your hardened heart**, O men of Judah and those who dwell in Jerusalem, lest his anger go out like a fire and burn, and there will be no one who can quench it from the presence of your wicked practices.  
Jeremiah 4:4a (LES)

7

- **We need this changed heart. How can we get it?** (Deuteronomy, which tells us about our need, also answers this question.)

**The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts** and the hearts of your descendants, and you will love Him with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.  
Deuteronomy 30:6 (BSB)

✓ **People do not want this change.** It goes *contrary* to their sinful natures. So how can it come to pass? **We need to rely on God to make this change within us!**

- » This is something that most people will *never* be willing to do. It's a change that can only come with repentance and trust in God.
- » People who do not have this change are described as having "uncircumcised hearts."
- » In New Testament (Greek) terms, they have spiritually "hard hearts" – the word Jesus used when explaining the reason for the divorce "permission" of Deuteronomy 24.

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- **The book of Jeremiah tells us more about this:**

✓ **This needed change is part of the New Covenant.** Under the *Old* Covenant, various *individuals* received changed hearts. But it would not happen on a *national* level until the *New* Covenant came.

- » We find out later that this New Covenant is available not just to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles! Because of this, the day is coming that the *whole earth* - not just Israel - will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord!

"But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD. I will put My law in their **minds** and inscribe it on their **hearts**. And I will be their God, and they will be My people."  
Jeremiah 31:33 (BSB); see also vs. 31-34.

✓ This covenant is comprised *only* of people who are loyal to the God of Israel. (Many people fake it, but - unlike the Old Covenant – God does not consider them to be part of this covenant.)

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- **The response of the people:**

✓ **The religious leaders** knew the original Hebrew concept, and they knew what it implied. So when Jesus said it, it was something they did not want to hear.

- » Jesus' statement would have been interpreted as a piercing condemnation.

✓ **Jesus' followers** also found some of his words difficult to accept – Matthew 19:10-12.

- **Has anything changed?**

✓ **It's no different today.** What Jesus said back then, people *still* don't want to hear. And even if they hear it, they often find it difficult to accept.

\* **But that doesn't change what Jesus said.**

10

**THE REAL ISSUE BEHIND DIVORCE:**

- **It's not divorce, but *hardness of heart*.**

✓ This is something that either individual (or both) can have.

... your **hardness of heart** ...  
Matthew 19:8b (BSB)

... your **hardness of heart**.  
Mark 10:5b (BSB)

✓ When Jesus made this reference to Deuteronomy 10:16, he was telling the religious leaders that they (as a group) had "spiritually uncircumcised" hard hearts.

✓ Taking into consideration what Deuteronomy 30:6 says (something they also knew) he was basically telling them that, unless their hearts changed, they were no different than the Old Testament Israelites that Moses spoke against.

✓ Describing it in terms that we use today, he was basically telling them that, if they didn't repent, **they were not saved.**

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- **Someone is certainly going to ask...**

**CAN I HAVE A HARD HEART AND STILL BE SAVED?**

**The answer...**

✓ **You cannot have a hard heart *as a way of life* and be saved.**

✓ This would be a *contradiction* to the very nature of salvation and grace; for saving grace **teaches** us to NOT be that way!

For **the grace of God** has appeared that offers salvation to all people. **It teaches us** to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ...  
Titus 2:11-12 (NIV)

✓ We could say that it's "theoretically possible" for a person to have a temporary "backsliding" into sin. But if you're a *genuine* follower of Jesus, **how could you want to choose that option?**

- » If you *did* somehow "backslide" ... and if you're a *genuine* follower of Jesus, **you will repent** and will truly *hate* the choice you made. There might also be horrible consequences that you regret for the rest of your life.

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• **Someone else will probably ask...**

**The answer...**

✓ If you're really *wanting* to "get away with sin," you already have reason to be concerned! Such an attitude is incompatible with salvation!

✓ You need to read 1 John, which warns us that we *cannot* continue to live a lifestyle of sin.

**No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.**

1 John 3:9 (NIV)

✓ None of us is totally *sinless*. But the issue involves our *willful* choices. Do we *choose* to sin, or to follow Jesus? Do we consider "little" sins to be OK, and only "big" ones are bad enough that they need to be avoided?

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**SO AS FAR AS DIVORCE IS CONCERNED, HOW DO WE APPLY THESE THINGS?**

- **First, we can conclude that the Old Testament regulations were given to *restrain* divorce, and to *minimize* its horrible consequences** (though it's not possible to totally *eliminate* them).
  - ⇒ In our own conduct, we need to encourage *restraint* and (if it happens) try to *minimize* its horrible consequences.
- ***Wanting a divorce should not be considered a good option*** (especially if it's combined with a desire to marry someone else).
  - ⇒ If it *does* end up being *necessary*, it shouldn't be that we *wanted* it to happen.
- **We should be slow in assigning "blame."** The surface issue (the divorce) is not the primary issue.
  - ⇒ Today's society often puts the blame on the men. Scripture points out (in Deuteronomy 24) that the woman may be at fault. And in reality, issues we *don't* see, and things of the past that we aren't even aware of, may be just as much a factor as what we *do* see.

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- **What if we know someone who got a divorce?**
  - ✓ Perhaps they don't realize how serious sin is – especially those sins that led up to the divorce. (This includes sins that may have been committed prior to marriage, or sins that the "innocent" person may do after marriage – things that may be socially acceptable to the world, but are condemned in Scripture.)
  - ✓ Perhaps they never paid attention to what Scripture says about "following Jesus." Most people (even church-goers) don't.
  - ★ *Ultimately, they need to focus on issues that are related to a "hard heart."*
- **But then, we need to consider ourselves.**
  - ✓ A person doesn't need a divorce, in order to have a superficial view of sin – especially sins that are socially acceptable.
  - ✓ A person doesn't need a divorce, in order to ignore what Scripture says about "following Jesus."
  - ★ *We also need to focus on issues that are related to a "hard heart."*

15

- **How can we respond to all this?**
  - ✓ **First, don't downplay the *seriousness of sin*** – theirs or ours.
    - » Realize also that the divorce itself isn't always the sin. (It's the things that lead up to the divorce, which are the primary issue.)
  - ✓ **Second, don't downplay the *potential for grace to change a person*** – whether us or them. For *all of us*, this is the *only* way that our hard hearts can be changed. (And this change is a *lifelong* process.)
    - » Yet realize that – in *both* cases – a spirit of *repentance* is necessary for this to happen, along with a willingness to submit to Scripture (which teaches us which actions and attitudes require repentance).
  - ✓ **Finally, realize that the *past* (for any of us) cannot be undone.**
    - » Our response to some issues may be a matter of *minimizing the damage* caused by past events, and *trusting God* for the future.

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## OUR MISSION: INTEGRITY!

- **Our tendency is to go to extremes, based on "half-truth."**
  - ✓ There are many Scriptures that tell us we have a responsibility to deal with sin within our "Christian family."
  - ✓ There are also many Scriptures that tell us to deal with our own sins first, rather than putting all our focus on others.
  - ↳ People tend to focus on *one* of these emphases, and ignore *the other* – which leads to a distortion of the truth, and sinful conduct (the sin of *omission*, if nothing else).
- **If we want to obey God, we need to do *both* – since *both* obligations are found in Scripture.**
  - Otherwise, we can't really say we are "following Jesus."

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