THIRD ANTITHESIS

*In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is instructing us in a righteousness that surpasses the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Our righteousness should be a redemptive righteousness. It is not merely a righteousness that avoids doing evil or simply does good. It's a righteousness that, like God's own righteousness, intervenes in the evil patters of fallen human life, a righteousness that takes flesh in the midst of all the perverse habits and cycles that shape the way we live and breaks them up from the inside. One area where this takes place is in marriage. When we obey Jesus' commandments, our marriages should become like the marriage in the garden, like the marriage of Jesus to His bride. When we obey Jesus' commandments, we really are not two by one flesh, and we don't rear apart what God has joined together. When we obey Jesus' commandments in the power of the Spirit, our marriages become zones of new creation in the midst of the old, our homes little Edens dotting the landscape and spreading to encompass the earth.*

*Leithart – Jesus as Israel, page 134-135*

*"And it was said, "Whoever divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, <u>except on the grounds of sexual infidelity</u>, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

*Matthew 5:31-32*

This third antithesis follows quite naturally after the second which concerned the issue of lust and the view Jesus held that lust indeed was adultery when harbored in the heart.

This third antithesis differs from the first two, however, in that it involves acts rather than thought. The same can be said for the remaining antitheses.

According to Matthew, Jesus accepts no excuse for divorce save for adultery. We can contrast this with Matthew 19:1-12 and especially with Mark 10:1-12 where in the latter case, no exception is given.

The Old Testament command being referred to here is Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

*When a man takes a wife and marries her, <u>if</u> then she finds no favor in his eyes because of he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and <u>if</u> she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates here and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, <u>then</u> her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD.*

*Contrary to what one might imagine just from the exception that Jesus cites, it does not command divorce per se: rather, it states that <u>if</u> a man finds something "indecent" about his wife and issues her a certificate of divorce, and <u>if</u> she marries a new husband who then legally divorces her (or dies), <u>then</u> the woman may not remarry her first husband. It is possible that the original motive behind this law was to protect the woman from having to provide the same man with two dowries (Westbrook 1986), and support for this interpretation might appear in Targum Neofiti, which elaborates, "if a man takes a wife and endows her" (referring to her dowry).*

*Craig Blomberg – Matthew, Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament, page 23*

Note the use of the word *"indecent"* which cannot be limited to infidelity since the provision of the Mosaic law for adultery was death.

The Pharisees of course, opened a discussion on the topic of divorce in Matthew 19:3-12 and Mark 10:2-12 as stated in the Old Testament case of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 given above. Their contention was that Moses himself, as the lawgiver, allowed for the matter of divorce.

*[3] And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" [4] He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, [5] and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? [6] So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." [7] They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" [8] He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. [9] And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, <u>except for sexual immorality</u>, and marries another, commits adultery."*

*[10] The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." [11] But he said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. [12] For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."*

*Matthew 19:3-12*

The Mark parallel is similar, save that it does not contain the above underlined exception clause.

The question that needs to be asked is if the *exception clause* was given by Jesus or not. There is evidence that Jesus himself did not add the exception.

1) Elsewhere in the Gospels, and in Matthew, Jesus sets forth the ethics of the Kingdom in absolute terms – the absolute prohibition of divorce: Mark 10:11, Luke 16:18, 1 Corinthians 7:11

2) The *exception clause* is an accommodation to the common understanding of Deuteronomy 24:1 which most likely reflects the common practice of Matthew's community.

3) the *exception clause* nullifies the antithesis and as Matthew records this same exception in 19:3-12, weakens the logic of the passage, since Jesus would now appear no different than the Pharisees.

> *"And it was said, "Whoever divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, <u>except on the grounds of sexual infidelity</u>, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*
> *Matthew 5:31-32*

As we have seen, when Jesus makes a strong statement against divorce as in Matthew 19:6, the Pharisees refer to the commandment of Moses in Deuteronomy 24:1 about giving the wife who is being divorced a legal document of certification. (This is akin to a relinquishing of rights before sending her out of the house. Divorce was exclusively the husband's prerogative).

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (above) is the commandment being referred to here by Jesus with his formula *"it was said."* And it just as clear that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 allows for divorce.

Jesus addresses this in Matthew 19:8.

> *He said to them, "Because of your hardness of hear Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."*
> *Matthew 19:8*

In the Sermon on the Mount via his antithetical interpretation of the law, Jesus disallows divorce on the ground that it causes adultery, first on the part of the divorced woman and secondly, on the part of any man who marries said woman.

The idea of a man committing adultery by marrying a divorced woman, seems to have been an innovation in the First Century. The theological premise for Jesus' view is given in Matthew in the following.

> *4 He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined*

*together, let not man separate."*
*Matthew 19:4-6*

The boldness of Jesus antithesis here is that, whereas Moses allowed divorce, Jesus disallows it.

Understand, the *exception clause* is unique to Matthew and that alone should lend some weight to the antithesis.

The meaning of the exception clause hinges, of course, on the meaning of the word *porneia.* The word regularly refers to sexual sins, such as fornication and adultery.

*When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because of he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house,*
*Deuteronomy 24:1*

*but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality (porneia), and from what has been strangled, and from blood.*
*Acts 15:20*

So then, if Matthew's *exception clause* means either sexual sins before marriage or extramarital intercourse, then, as we have seen v.32 presents no antithesis to v. 31 or to Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which lies behind it.

It amounts instead only to an affirmation of *"what was said"* – and is thus in effect a siding with the Pharisees and their school of theology. They would have held the underscored word *"indecency"* above, which means *nakedness of a thing, shameful, uncleanness,* as only a sexual sin. This one word was the debate among the Pharisees concerning grounds for a divorce.

This all amounts to the discovery of sexual sins whether occurring before marriage or after.

Another interpretation of the word *"indecency"* would regard incestuous marital relationships. In this view, *porneia* refers not to sexual immorality but rather to the specific problems of incestuous marriage which would be marriages forbidden under the Law in Leviticus 18:6-18

According to this view, Matthew's Jewish-Christian readers, apprehensive about the influx of the large numbers of Gentiles into the church, would have considered it important that those who had marriage within the forbidden degrees of kinship, allowed by pagan law, be divorced since they had unknowingly violated the law revealed by God.

We will proceed with the former view in mind since there is no evidence that Matthew's community was specifically concerned with the lives of gentile converts to Christianity. Also, would Matthew have inserted ethical material that had no direct relevance to his Jewish Christian readers?

What is important to note is that the radical character of the righteousness of the Kingdom demands a return to the standard of the Garden of Eden where God Himself first joined the participants of marriage.

And it is this return to that demanding standard that Jesus in Matthew 19: 3-12 refers back to the Garden himself and does not engage in any personal entanglements that the Pharisees sought to engage him in.

> *So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."*
> *Matthew 19:6*

The attitude of Jesus in the verse above, which lacks the *exception clause,* is absolute; it is indeed so stern that the disciples wonder who can tolerate such a high standard.

This then is Jesus' *antithesis* Deuteronomy 24:1.

> *The husband who divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery because in the culture of that day, unlike ours, a single woman could hardly survive on her own, expect through prostitution. She was therefore bound to take another husband and so be made into an adulteress. And the man who married such a divorced woman himself committed adultery in do doing, because he has married the wife of another man, This viewpoint presupposes the permanent character of the marriage bond. For Jesus, not even divorce can change that fact.*
> *Hagner – Matthew, page 125*

A divorce always means the tearing apart of something that God has joined together.

While the Mosaic Law allowed for divorce due to the hardness of people's hearts, Jesus interpreted the law by citing the original intention of God in joining a couple in the covenant of marriage in the Garden.

The point of speaking of remarriage as involving *"adultery"* is simply to emphasize the wrongness of divorce.

Moses allowed divorce *and* remarriage – because of the hardness of the hearts of the people. In this era of the New Covenant of the Kingdom, followers of Jesus are still not rid of their hard hearts, then divorce and remarriage will continue just as it did among the people of God under the Old Covenant.

> *Matthew' won insertion of the exception clause, modifying the absolute teaching of Jesus, is just an admission in the church of his day. Still, however, it is worth adding that conceding the hard realities of our continuing fallenness and the reality of forgiveness for those who fail must not allow us to weaken our commitment to continue to strive after the ideal.*
> *Hagner – Matthew, page 126*