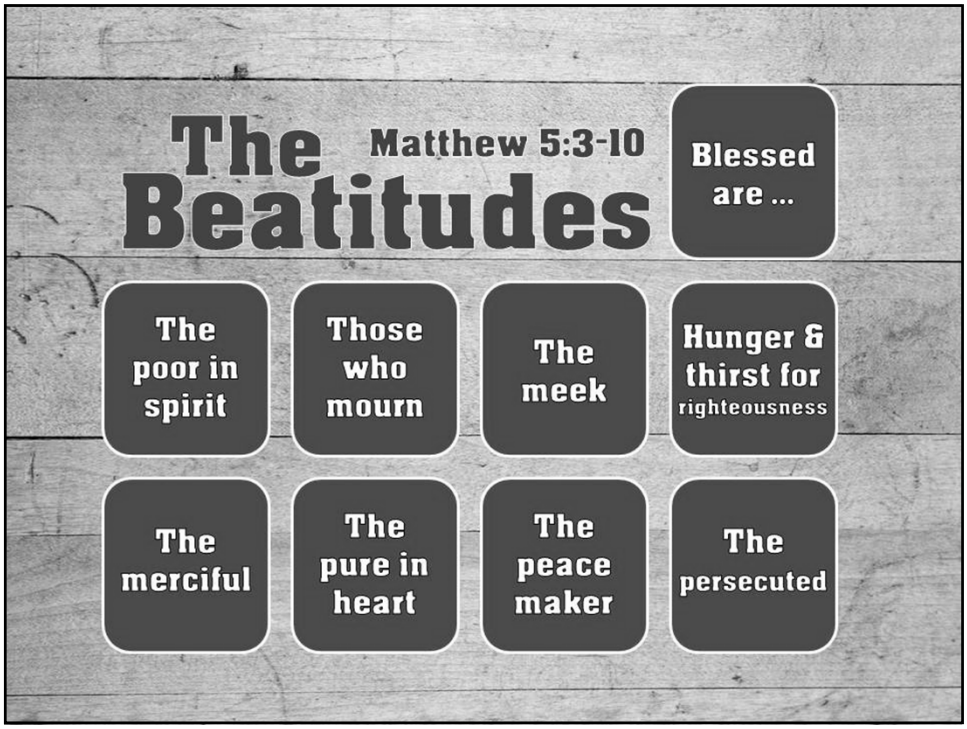

These are the
BE-attitudes
Not the
do-attitudes

"Poor in spirit"

- We must be empty before we can be full. The opposite of this is self-sufficiency. Our sufficiency is not of ourselves 2 Cor. 3:5
- The world promotes self-sufficiency, yet God dwells with the person whose heart is broken Isa. 57:15
- This does not mean false humility or cowardice; it means a proper attitude toward self, realizing how weak and sinful we are apart from Christ.

"Mourn"

- This is sincere sorrow for sin, our sin and the sins of others.
- How careless we are about sin! We excuse it, yet God hates it, and sin breaks God's heart.
- Beware of the sorrow of this world 2 Cor. 7:8–10
  - Peter mourned with godly sorrow and was forgiven;

"Meek"

- Meekness is not weakness!
- Jesus was meek Matt 11:29
  - yet He drove the changers from the temple.
- Moses was meek Num 12:3
  - yet he judged sinners; even faced Aaron with his sin.
- Meekness means not asserting my own rights, but living for the glory of God.
- Christians are to show meekness Eph 4:1–2; Titus 3:2
- So good that you have nothing to prove Ps 37

"Meek"

- We find this in Psalm 37:11
- The meek are not inheriting the earth today
- They will when Christ is reigning on the earth

"Hunger and thirst"

- A true Christian has an appetite for spiritual things.
- Ask people what they desire and you will know what they are like.
- Character is what you are when no one is looking.
- This is evidence of your new life in Christ. How do you know if you're saved?
  - One way you can tell is by checking your appetites, what do you hunger and thirst after?
- The natural man will have nothing of this

"Merciful"

- Not legalism, but merely the working of the Biblical principle of sowing and reaping
- If we show mercy, because Christ has been merciful to us, then mercy will come back to us Luke 16:1–13; James 2:13; Prov. 11:17
- We cannot earn mercy, but we must have hearts prepared to receive it

"Pure in heart"

- Not sinlessness but the truth within
  Ps. 51:6; 1 John 1:8
- It means a single heart, not divided between God and the world
- No honest man can say that his heart is pure. How can the heart of man, which is desperately wicked, be made clean?
  - The Lord Jesus said, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you"
    John 15:3
  - It is by the washing of regeneration that we are made clean. Only the blood of Christ can cleanse us from all sin Cf. John 1:7

"Peacemakers"

- This world is at war Titus 3:3
- Christians have the Gospel of peace on their feet, so that wherever they go, they bring peace Eph. 6:15
- This is not "peace at any price," for holiness is more important than a peace based on sin
  James 3:17; Heb. 12:14
- Compromise is not peace; but Christians should not be contentious as they contend for the faith

- God hates discord: Prov 6:16-19
- Lord loves peace: Rom 14:19; 15:33
- There is no one today who can make peace, but Christ alone, the great Peacemaker.
  - He made peace by His blood between a righteous God and an unrighteous sinner.
- Things which are *not* of peace: Gal 5:19-21

"Persecuted"

- We should be accused "falsely." We should never be guilty of deliberately inviting persecution. 2 Tim. 3:12
- If we live godly lives, suffering will come!
  - Note the rewards: we are in the same company as Christ and the prophets, and we shall be rewarded in heaven.

In regard to Murder (5:21)

- Basic Concept:
  The Law says: "do not murder"

- The Broadened Concept:
  Jesus Says: that hating someone is the same as murder. Our relationship with God is dependent on our relationship with others.

In regard to Adultery (5:27-30

- Basic Concept:
  The Law says: "Do not commit adultery."

- The Broadened Concept:
  Jesus Says that looking lustfully at someone is the same as adultery.

In regard to Divorce (5:31-32)

- Basic Concept:
  The Law says: "A man can divorce his wife by merely giving her a letter of divorce."

- The Broadened Concept:
  Jesus Says that unlawful divorce and remarriage is the same as adultery.

In regard to Oaths (5:33-37)

- Basic Concept:
  The Law says: "You must carry out the vows you have made to the Lord."

- The Broadened Concept:
  Jesus Says "Don't make any vows!" A simple yes or no should suffice.

In regard to retaliation (5:38-42)

- Basic Concept:
  The Law says: "An Eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

Lex talionis: Law of retaliation

- The law of Moses prevented offended people from taking the law into their own hands and seeking private revenge against an enemy. It also kept magistrates from issuing exorbitant sentences that did not fit the offenses.
  Lev. 24:19–22

NOT to be prescriptive – rather it was descriptive.

In regard to retaliation (5:38-42)

- Basic Concept:
  The Law says: "An Eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

- The Broadened Concept:
  Jesus Says to turn the other cheek, and to do more than is demanded.

In regard to LOVE

- Basic Concept:
  The Law says:
  "Love you neighbor and hate your enemy."

- The Broadened Concept:
  Jesus Says: "Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!"

BLOG / WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT CAPITAL PUNISHMENT?

September 27, 2011

What Does the Bible Say About Capital Punishment?

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Senior manager of content for Bible Gateway.

Last week was a sobering one here in the United States. In an unusual (and uncomfortable) convergence of timelines, the last week witnessed the executions of three death-row prisoners: Troy Davis, whose murder conviction has been the subject of controversy for years; Lawrence Brewer, an avowed racist who participated in the horrifying murder of James Byrd; and Derrick Mason, who brutally killed a store clerk in 1994.

Although capital punishment is a perennial subject of moral and political debate in the U.S., the timing of these three executions gives the topic an added sense of urgency. The Davis and Brewer executions in particular stand as troubling counterpoints: Davis' execution was haunted by nagging questions about whether the American system of justice had acted fairly, while Brewer's crime and unrepentant attitude are so morally revolting that they seem to make a compelling case for harsh justice.

You can be sure that the debate over capital punishment in the U.S. will be reinvigorated by these high-profile executions—and judging by the number of death-penalty-related articles and blog posts in my RSS reader, it already has been.

So what does the Bible say about capital punishment?

The answer is "it's complicated." (If it weren't, Christians wouldn't still be debating the topic thousands of year later.) It's a topic that requires modern readers to distinguish between *descriptive* Bible content (that simply describes, in a historical sense, the state of things in Bible times, without necessarily requiring it of believers today) and *prescriptive* Bible content (that imparts an authoritative command or guideline for Christians of all eras). There's no easy answer to the question, but here are some Bible verses and questions to help you consider the issue.

Capital punishment was a significant feature in the justice system of Old Testament Israel. Execution was called for in response to extreme civil crimes like murder and rape, as well as for offenses against God's holiness, like false prophecy and witchcraft. There were mechanisms in place to avert the death penalty in some situations, and God sometimes spared the lives of people whose actions, legally speaking, would have otherwise meant the death penalty. The establishment of capital punishment in ancient Israel is often used to argue for the death penalty in modern times—and it seems reasonable to conclude that since God incorporated it into Israelite society, capital punishment is not antithetical to His nature.

The death penalty was never employed arbitrarily or frivolously. In fact, observing the use of capital punishment in the Old Testament actually shows us how precious human life is to God. Because human beings are image-bearers of God, murder was such a serious affront to both God and man that it had to be answered with the blood of the murderer. Genesis 9:6 suggests that this sense of justice is woven into the moral fabric of Creation:

Whoever sheds man's blood,
his blood will be shed by man,
for God made man
in His image. – Genesis 9:6 (HCSB)

Christians are well aware of the atoning power of blood, believing that Christ's blood—shed at his execution on the cross—spares us from the spiritual "death penalty" that our sins would otherwise merit.

When applying these principles to our modern system of justice, however, we should be aware of the different context we live in. Ancient Israelite society was unique in that it was a true theocracy—God Himself crafted its laws. God clearly has the authority to save or condemn human lives, but does that authority still exist in a democratic government devised by fallible men and women?

The New Testament adds important context to the topic but doesn't clearly instruct us one way or the other regarding the death penalty. The apostle Paul acknowledges that wielding "the sword" is a legitimate exercise of government authority—presumably he is referring to its duty to punish criminals, with violence if necessary. On the other hand, many of Jesus' actions and words, such as his foiling of the execution of the adulterous woman, suggest that mercy and humility should stay society's killing hand. And of course, no Christian is unaware of Jesus' own experience with capital punishment: he was the ultimate innocent victim of the government's sword wielded unjustly.

Because the New Testament's gospel of grace is held to have fulfilled the Old Testament law, it is worth questioning whether Old Testament capital punishment—a powerful enforcer of that law—is a tool we should use today or whether it was appropriate only within the context of the Old Testament covenant. An over-arching theme of the New Testament is the undeserved forgiveness extended to us by a merciful God. As recipients of God's grace, we are called to extend grace to others as well. How do we reconcile the need for justice with the importance of mercy and forgiveness? Do the requirements of justice trump the opportunity for mercy, or vice versa?

It would be much easier if God had chosen to clearly state one way or the other whether capital punishment is a moral responsibility for modern representative governments. But for His own reasons, He has not done so—which means we must continue to wrestle with Scripture, prayerfully try to discern the best course of action, and respect other Christians doing the same. Regardless of our conclusions, Christians must make sure that Christlike values—justice, humility, and grace—motivate us, rather than vengeance or hate; and whether Christians choose to support or oppose capital punishment, we are all called to make sure that it is carried out justly and does not target innocent people.

Q: The New Testament seems to support divorce for a narrow range of reasons, but does it support remarriage?
A: There are three New Testament passages that bear most directly on the subject of divorce and remarriage. I suggest that when they are carefully considered, they prove to be both more demanding and less restrictive on the question of divorce and remarriage than evangelicals have often acknowledged.

Luke 16:18 is a very bold, straightforward saying that seems to settle the issue quickly:

"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery" (all quotations from the NRSV). Both divorce and remarriage are just plain wrong—right?

Almost all New Testament scholars agree that this saying is an abbreviation of a saying of Jesus that appears in its fuller form in Matthew 5:31□32 in the Sermon on the Mount. After discussing his views contrasted with those in Judaism, Jesus remarks, "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

It is noteworthy that Jesus clearly sees some circumstances that legitimize divorce. A marriage continues to be valid until one party dissolves the marriage through unfaithfulness. This so-called exception clause appears here in Matthew 5 and again in Matthew 19 but does not occur in either Mark or Luke.

Churches and Christian institutions are mistaken when they indiscriminately deny the possibility of leadership or remarriage after men and women have divorced.

In a similar passage in Mark 10:11□12, Jesus widens the scope of the teaching to show that such dissolution may apply to the behavior of either the man or the woman (even though in Jewish custom women could not divorce their husbands, Jesus includes women equally in his charge): "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." A more literal translation of "she commits adultery" reads, "she is adulterized," meaning if a woman is divorced without just cause, she is left in a valid marriage. Remarriage for her would, therefore, be adultery. In saying this, Jesus may very well have had in mind the practice of men discharging their wives without just cause, thereby exploiting them.

But how do we apply the "exception clause" today? Does Jesus only accept divorce as legitimate—but not remarriage for the innocent partner? In the Jewish society of Jesus' day, remarriage was always assumed for the innocent party unless prohibited for some particular reason. Unfaithfulness, therefore, would make a marriage invalid since a valid divorce canceled the marriage bond and allowed the innocent party to remarry exactly like a single person.

Jesus, in his radical kingdom commands, takes divorce very seriously. There is serious judgment for sin, but, at the same time, there is and should be no condemnation for the innocent.

"Why did Moses permit divorce?"
The second crucial passage is Matthew 19:3□12 (see also Mark 10:2□12). Here some Pharisees are testing Jesus' reading of divorce law. Jesus defends the permanence of marriage by appealing to Genesis□that the "two shall become one flesh." To answer why Moses permitted divorce, Jesus replies, "It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery."

Note that again Jesus includes the "exception clause," which legitimizes divorces dissolved through unfaithfulness. The problem here has to do with Jewish laws that let men freely discharge their wives, often on spurious grounds. One great rabbi, Shammai, taught that the only basis for divorce was sexual unfaithfulness or adultery. But the Rabbi Hillel was more generous: "A man may divorce his wife even if she burned his soup . . . or spoiled a dish for him." Rabbi Akiba taught that divorce was acceptable "if he should find a woman fairer than his wife." Such divorces left women adrift in a male world, without hope of remarriage, and completely at a loss. Jesus is standing against such divorces of convenience.

He was also standing against the teaching that a man was *required* to dispense with his wife when he suspected unfaithfulness. (Consider Joseph's reaction when he learned of Mary's surprise pregnancy.) Jesus amends this, finding such behavior intolerable. Moses did not *command* his people to divorce wives; he *permitted* it. The springboard for right action should not be hard-heartedness, but charity. Jesus affirms once more that only if the woman has done something herself that irreparably ruptures the marriage can such a divorce be right. But it isn't a necessary response.

Many today have misread this particular passage to make two statements: (1) One cannot divorce his wife unless she has been unfaithful; (2) Whoever remarries commits adultery. But this is not the meaning. The active verb here is "commits adultery," and the entire sentence must be held together. It should be read, "Whoever does the following commits adultery: divorces his wife (except for immorality) and remarries another." Judgment is being placed not on someone remarrying but on someone remarrying after pursuing an illegitimate divorce. If the divorce is invalid, so is the remarriage. But the reverse is also true: if the divorce is valid, then re marriage must be acceptable, just as it was in commonplace Jewish custom.

"Not bound" to the marriage

A third important passage is found in 1 Corinthians 7, where Paul discusses Christian marriage. He echoes the teaching of Jesus, saying that husbands and wives are not permitted to leave each other but should work toward reconciliation. Then Paul addresses a subject that was foreign to Jesus and the Gospels. What if a Christian man or woman had a pagan spouse? Could there be spiritual union between two people when one worshiped idols? Paul affirms that Christians should not initiate a divorce because of the spouse's spiritual deficiencies: "If any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her" (v. 12). The presence of a Christian in the marriage, Paul is saying, brings hope of salvation to the children and the family.

But then Paul makes one exception to Jesus' rule on divorce: If the unbelieving spouse deserts the marriage, the innocent spouse must work on reconciliation (vv. 10–11), but in the end "is not bound." This final phrase in verse 15 is crucial. The innocent party is not bound to the marriage, and this includes women or men equally. This language echoes words directly from Jewish divorce law: "not bound" means that the innocent person is free to remarry.

Paul even reinforces his thought in 7:26@28: "I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin." More literally rendered, Paul does not say "are you free," he says, "are you *freed*," meaning, someone who has been freed from a marriage, namely, someone who was married and divorced. Paul prefers they remain single because of the suffering of this age, but if they marry, according to verse 28, they do not sin.

In sum, Paul adds one more possible reason for a valid divorce: the desertion of a marriage by an unbelieving partner. In such a case, while the Christian spouse should not be eager to divorce, still, if he or she is a victim of divorce, he or she may remarry.

"The husband of one wife"

Finally, Paul makes some remarks about the nature of marriage in his pastoral letters that reflect on the issue of divorce and remarriage. In both 1 Timothy 3:2 and in Titus 1:6, Paul stipulates that bishops (1 Timothy) and elders (Titus) should be "married only once" or "the husband of one wife." These verses have led many Christian organizations to disqualify potential leaders who have ever been divorced. But I doubt that this is even near what Paul is thinking.

First, he may be referring to polygamy. While having multiple wives was against Roman law, still, it was legal in Palestinian Judaism even though monogamy was the norm. Jewish oral tradition, in fact, justifies having 18 wives. Thus, Paul may be saying that these Christian leaders must have "just one wife."

Second, evidence from Greco-Roman society indicates that some men did have concubines even though they were illegal in both Greek and Roman society. Paul may be making it absolutely

clear: Christian men must be pure and moral in their marital relations. He is looking for leaders with stable family lives.

The New Testament, therefore, tells us that marriage is to be seen as a divinely instituted relationship between a man and a woman. It should be monogamous and permanent. However, there are two exceptions where divorce is valid: when a spouse is unfaithful and when an unbelieving spouse deserts the marriage. In each case, the marriage is dissolved and the innocent partner is free to remarry.

Divorce is the tragic result of what he comes of humanity as it wrestles with sin and brokenness. Whenever a marriage fails, we should mourn it as tragic. But there should be no error so grave that it cannot be forgiven, no mistake beyond the reach of grace.

Likewise, our God is a God of renewal and restoration. In some cases, this means restoring a marriage to its original partnership. In other cases—and I can think of many—it means that remarriage is an opportunity for renewal and new hope. This is why churches and Christian institutions are mistaken when they indiscriminately deny the possibility of leadership positions or remarriage after men and women have divorced. Such a position denies not only the spirit of Jesus' ministry but also misunderstands the grace of God in a broken world.

By Gary M. Burge, professor of New Testament at Wheaton College and Graduate School. Send questions for Directions to Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188; or to cleditor@christianitytoday.com.

Biblical Love – Luke 10:27 (ESV)

- 27 And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

Who is my Neighbor – Luke 10:30–37 (ESV)

30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell
among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half
dead.
31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he
passed by on the other side.
32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the
other side.
33 But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him,
he had compassion.
34 He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set
him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 And
the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take
care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'
36 Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell
among the robbers?"
37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do
likewise."