**Except**

It had been on John and Elizabeth’s mind for some years, before I ever preached a sermon in NY. I preached 3 or 4 lessons on the silence of the scriptures. When God says nothing or when he is silent, there is no permission granted. The principal impacts the way we look at God’s word. “You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you” (Deut. 4:2). So as I am preaching about

respecting God’s silence while John and Elizabeth are thinking of their marriage.

If I remember correctly, Elizabeth was in her 2nd marriage. No adultery was involved in her previous divorce. They actually came to the church years earlier, seeking advice if they had the right to remarry. I guess no one told them what Jesus said. Jesus says there is but one exception. “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” (Matt. 19:9). Elizabeth had not divorced her previous husband for sexual immorality, but other reasons. But she divorced and married John anyway, although Jesus calls this “adultery”. What Jesus calls adultery, his church does too. So the only exception Jesus gives for divorce and remarrying, is when a spouse divorces for “sexual immorality”. This is the only reason for divorce Jesus permits remarrying.

Even though the apostle Paul was not there to hear Jesus say these words, through the Holy Spirit he knows it. Paul writes, “But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.” (1Cor. 7:10-11).

John and Elizabeth had a guilty conscience as they listened to the sermons that week. Later John came and talked to the men of the church about his marriage. John said that God seems to be silent about any other reason. John had come to the conclusion that before the eyes of God and the church, they were living in adultery. So instead of separating from his unscriptural wife, he separated from the church and God. To love Jesus, trust Jesus, is to follow what he said. “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me”, said Jesus (Mark 8:34). Let us deny ourselves and follow what he said, not follow the impulses of our hearts. Dan Peters