

The Sermon on the Mount
What Jesus Really Said About Divorce (Part 2)
Matthew 55:31-32

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For those of you who might be our guests today, let me just tell you that you find us several months into a study of our Lord's most famous sermon. We call it the Sermon on the Mount. And I invite you to turn there with us to Matthew 5. We come on what is really a hard text, a hard passage, but we don't have the luxury of ignoring what our Lord has said or of dodging it because it's contrary to the culture and times in which we live.

Back in 1985, a man named Robert Bellah wrote a book called *Habits of the Heart*. And in that book, he wrote what is I think a very insightful statement. Listen to what Bellah wrote: "There is a visible tendency in many evangelical circles to thin the biblical language of sin and redemption to an idea of Jesus as the friend who helps us find happiness and self-fulfillment." It's really an amazingly insightful statement written back in 1985, that there is a tendency among evangelical Christians to so rid themselves of the concept of sin and redemption, to so thin that terminology, until Jesus becomes nothing more than One who exists to make me happy. That's why He exists. That really has infected so much of American Christianity and this kind of pursuit of self-fulfillment and personal happiness has been particularly deadly when it comes to the concept of Christians and marriage and divorce. Christians infected with this toxic kind of thinking reason something like this: 'If my marriage isn't making me happy, then surely Jesus, who exists to make me happy, doesn't want me to stay in this marriage and to continue to be unhappy. And so it must be acceptable to Jesus for me to end this unhappy marriage and pursue my happiness and self-fulfillment elsewhere.'

Perhaps the most well-known example of this or at least the first, sort of major example that hit the news media, this kind of thinking when it comes to Christian marriage and divorce, was the female vocalist Amy Grant. When she ended her first marriage to marry number two, she said that she understood that God hates divorce, but she had come to find a more profound and compelling and freeing truth. In August of 1998, she told her husband and also her pastor: "I believe and trust that I have been released from this marriage. And I say that, knowing that even the Bible says *the heart is deceitful*." Now how did she come to that? How did she come to know this? She goes on to say: "To the best of my level of peace, I had a very settled, unshakable feeling about the path I was going to follow." She came to have a sense of peace that was unshakable that she should make that choice. Now how did she come about that peace? Who gave her the sense of confidence to have that kind of peace? Well, sadly I'm afraid it was her

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Christian counselor. Her Christian counselor encouraged her decision with these words: “Amy, God made marriage for people. He didn’t make people for marriage. He provided this so that people could enjoy each other to the fullest.” Do you hear Bellah’s language? Marriage exists for your happiness and satisfaction. And so the counselor goes on to say: “I say if you have two people that are not thriving healthily in a situation, I say remove the marriage.” Well, I’m sure the advice was well-intentioned, but let me just say that it doesn’t matter what he says about divorce. It doesn’t matter what I say about divorce. It doesn’t matter what you say about divorce and remarriage. What matters is what does our Lord say? And that’s the question that He’s answering for us from Matthew 5.

We’re studying the third illustration Jesus gives in Matthew 5 of how His disciples’ righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees. He said that back in 5:20. And He then gives six illustrations of how our righteousness (the righteousness of His disciples) surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees. So we’re looking at the third illustration, but it is still closely related to the second illustration because, in this third illustration, Jesus continues to deal with the seventh commandment: “You shall not commit adultery.” In the previous illustration, He used it in regard to lust. And now here in the third illustration, He closes yet another loophole that the scribes had made in the seventh commandment.

Look at it with me, Matthew 5:31-32.

“It was said, ‘Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce’: but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

Jesus says to us that His true disciples keep their marriage covenant. Now Jesus’ point in these couple of illustrations is that you and I can break the seventh commandment in several different ways, the commandment against adultery. We can break it obviously by a sexual act of sin with someone other than our spouse - any sexual relationship outside of marriage. But in the second illustration back up in verses 27 to 30, Jesus makes it clear that we can break the seventh commandment not only by a sexual sin outside of marriage, a sexual act, but by tolerating lust in the heart. And now here in this third illustration, Jesus says that you and I can break the seventh commandment by pursuing a divorce without biblical grounds.

Now let me just remind you of what we covered the last time we looked at this text two weeks ago. We began with looking at a serious distortion of the Old Testament teaching on divorce. We looked at what the scribes taught and you see that in verse 31: “It was said (*that’s a shorter version of what our Lord had said before. This is what you have been taught the law means, He says*), ‘Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce...’” Now that is

not a direct quotation from the Old Testament; instead, it is a combination of two comments from Deuteronomy 24:1-4 that the scribes had taken, in a sense, almost from their context and joined them together and made them a command. In context, they're not a command. You see, the scribes assumed that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was the definitive Old Testament teaching on divorce and remarriage. However, while they agreed on that, there was disagreement about what it actually meant.

And last time, I told you there were basically two views in the first century of Deuteronomy 24, where it says that "when a man takes a wife and marries her, it happens that he finds no favor in her eyes because 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 from her house" - there was some debate, a lot of debate, about what that indecency was and the Jewish Mishnah records it. There were two schools of thought. There was the really conservative school of thought which was the school of Shammai which said what that means is that a man can only divorce his wife when there is unchastity (was the word) some kind of sexual sin. The other school of thought was the school of Hillel, another rabbi. And Hillel taught that a man may divorce his wife for any reason at all. He said, 'You know, if she talks badly about his parents, if she puts her hair down in public, if she burns his food - for any of those reasons, he can divorce her.' In fact, one rabbi in this school actually said that if a man finds someone that he thinks is more beautiful, then it meets the qualification of Deuteronomy 24. That's what the rabbis taught. Now you can imagine which of those was more popular. Of course the rabbi Hillel - his liberal views on divorce and remarriage were the accepted view in the first century. There were very few who held the more conservative view of Shammai.

Now what exactly did the Old Testament teach? Well, we looked at Deuteronomy 24 and I'm not going to go back there today, but I just want to remind you very briefly of what we learned from Deuteronomy 24:1-4. First of all, that supposedly foundational text on divorce and remarriage is not teaching the biblical grounds for divorce; that's not its primary purpose. Number two: it is not commenting on the morality of divorce. It is simply acknowledging that it exists and it's regulating it. It doesn't say whether it's right or wrong. Thirdly, that text does, however, acknowledge that divorce is present in Israel and will be present in Israel. There were already divorces in the time of Moses and I showed you that last time. Number four: we said that Deuteronomy 24 is dealing not with a general principle, but with a specific circumstance that could happen when divorce is allowed. Verses 1 through 3 are an 'if' statement; verse 4 is a 'then' statement. Basically, Moses says if a man marries a woman and then he divorces her and she goes and marries another man and that man either dies or divorces her, then (verse 4) she can't go back to the first husband. That's what this passage teaches. It also insists that if there is a divorce, it must be accompanied by a written certificate. That was for the protection of the woman and God instituted a protection on her behalf. And then finally, we saw from this text

that it is not commanding a man to divorce his wife. It permits divorce and it leaves therefore open the possibility that there might be a legitimate reason for divorce and remarriage.

So what was the problem with the scribes and Pharisees? The problem with their view was that they distorted what this passage teaches about divorce and they had turned marriage into a no-fault relationship. You can get out of it for any reason at all. All you need to do is write her a certificate of divorce and send her away. And that's what marriage had become. It had become, as one author describes it, "a disposable contractual arrangement."

By the way, most of the scribes and Pharisees bought into that lax, liberal view toward divorce and remarriage. When we think of the Pharisees, we tend to think of people who were legalistic on everything. But when it came to divorce and remarriage, they were not. I showed you the life of Josephus, who was a confirmed Pharisee and who was faithful to his religion even though he ultimately became a historian for Rome. And he was married four times and that was no problem for the Pharisees. That was the climate in which this interchange happened. In fact, it was so pervasive that when Jesus taught about a year after the Sermon on the Mount when He came back to this issue of divorce and remarriage and He taught the exact same thing, you know what His disciples, *His disciples* said in response to His view on divorce and remarriage? They said, 'Well, it's better for a man not to marry.' Matthew 19:10 – After Jesus taught about divorce and remarriage, "the disciples said to Him, 'If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, then it's better not to marry.'" That was the Twelve. So that is the atmosphere in which this statement of our Lord's occurs. And I think it's important for you to understand that, because we have this sort of simplistic thinking that yeah, Jesus could say that, but you know those were simpler times. Listen. Jesus' teaching on divorce did not grow out of a conservative culture. His teaching was completely countercultural. And in fact, I think it would have been more countercultural then than it even is today. What He had to say about divorce He spoke in times very much like our own.

Now this morning I want us to move forward from there. That's all sort of review to pick us back up to speed. I want us to look at the second part of this brief paragraph. Let's call it Jesus' correction of the Old Testament teaching on divorce. He's not correcting the Old Testament. He's correcting the false view that the scribes and Pharisees had presented about the Old Testament's perspective. Look at verse 32: "but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." Now I want you to notice, and it's obvious, there is an exception clause in that sentence – "except for the reason of unchastity." And we will look at what is clearly a legitimate exception to what our Lord is teaching here next week. And we'll look at the other New Testament exception as well. But what I want you to see is that it is, after all, an exception; it's not the main point. So that we get the full impact of Jesus' main point in this text, let me read verse 32 again, but without the exception clause. Verse 32: "But I say to

you that everyone who divorces his wife. . . makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” Those are hard, powerful words. If we were to reduce Jesus’ perspective on divorce to a simple sentence, He would be saying something like this: ‘Sinful divorce (*and again, there is divorce that is not sinful; there are two biblical exceptions. We’ll deal with those next week, but sinful divorce, every other kind of divorce that doesn’t meet those exceptions*) is a violation of the seventh commandment against adultery and so God hates it and completely forbids it among His people.’ As we will discover, there are only two small exceptions to that overarching principle.

Now Jesus addressed this issue of divorce and remarriage at least three times in His earthly ministry. Here in the Sermon on the Mount was chronologically the first time that He addressed it. The second time was in Luke 16:18 when He confronted the Pharisees’ view. That would’ve been about a year later after the Sermon on the Mount. And then the third time this comes up is just shortly before the Passion Week when Jesus is on His way, He’s not quite to Jericho on His way to Jerusalem. And there, there’s a confrontation with the Pharisees that is recorded in two places. It’s recorded in Matthew 19:1-10 and in Mark 10:1-12.

Now we’re going to come back to Matthew 5:32 but, before we look at 5:32, I want you to see the Lord’s more complete teaching on this issue and then that will put Matthew 5:32 in its context. So let’s go to Mark 10. Again, this is about a year and a half after the Sermon on the Mount. And here we find the design of marriage, the design of marriage. Our Lord wants to correct the false views of marriage and divorce and so He begins here with the design of marriage. Just to give us a context, and I looked at these verses last time so I am not going to explain them much, but let’s just read them. Mark 10:1,

Getting up, He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; (*so He’s over in Perea on the other side of Jericho at the north end of the Dead Sea*) crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them. Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife.

Matthew adds ‘for any reason at all’ which was the prevailing view. Is that what you believe? They’re probably hoping to put Jesus on the hot seat here, maybe even with Herod, whose region He was in. You remember Herod is the one who arrested John the Baptist and had him killed because of John’s strict views of divorce and remarriage. So maybe that’s what they’re hoping to do but, at the very least, they’re hoping to paint Jesus out as very unpopular with the men in the audience because He’s holding a much stricter view than the normal view.

And He answered them (*verse 3*), ‘What did Moses command you?’ (*Jesus says, ‘What does the Bible say?’ Specifically, what did Moses say about this? Verse 4*) They said,

‘Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.’ (*Again, they go back to Deuteronomy 24*). But Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.’

Jesus asked them what Moses taught and, in response, they go back to Deuteronomy 24 and an obscure case law about a specific circumstance, and even that they misquote. And so Jesus takes them back not to Deuteronomy 24, but back to the institution of marriage all the way back at the beginning. Look at verse 6: “But from the beginning of creation...” Jesus goes back to creation, back to God’s purpose in creating marriage and He quotes from two passages early in Genesis – Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24. Now why does He go back there? Jesus is making a larger point and that is that marriage is not a social construct. We need to hear that again in our day when people are trying to define marriage however they want with the homosexual community. Listen. Nobody gets to define marriage. God’s already defined it. It’s not something man created as a matter of convenience or tax deduction. God established the place of marriage when there were only two people on the planet. That’s the institution of marriage. It’s from the beginning.

Now Jesus goes on to describe the acceptable participants of marriage here. First of all, male and female – look at verse 6: “But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.” He’s quoting Genesis 1:27 and His point is basically this: when God chose to make mankind male and female in a way that they physically correspond to each other, God was making it clear that marriage was in His ultimate plan and that marriage would be between male and female. You know, this is so obvious even in everyday business and commerce. You know, if you, God forbid, have to do any plumbing repair in your house, you go to the Home Depot and you go to the plumbing section and you’ll find that often they’re referring to the parts as male and female. Why? Why do they call one part a male part and the other part a female part? It’s to picture a reality and that is to show that they were made for each other. They were made to fit together. Two males don’t work. Two females don’t work. It takes a male and a female to complete the union both in plumbing parts and in marriage.

Now He goes on to say it’s male and female and only two of them. Notice verse 8: “and the two shall become one flesh; they are no longer two, but one flesh.” He quotes, first of all, Genesis 2 and then Jesus rephrases it in His own words and He’s making the same point in both. When God instituted marriage, He made only two - Adam and Eve. For Adam, God created one woman, not a harem. If you want the divine design, don’t go to the pattern of sin that you see in the Old Testament. Go back to the original creation. Go back to the beginning, Jesus says. In fact, the first case of polygamy recorded in Scripture is in the reprobate line of Cain - Lamech the murderer, who took two wives, Genesis 4:19 says. Now bigamy was present among the patriarchs and Deuteronomy 21 regulates, but not condones, that activity. But by far, the greatest problem with polygamy was with Israel’s kings during the period of the monarchy. They bought into the mindset of the kings around them and that is, if you wanted to be strong, you needed to

make alliances with countries around you. And the chief way to make that alliance was to have that king's daughter as your wife. And so don't stop with one ally; let's have several allies. And pretty soon, you have many wives and a harem. And so to make political alliances, they married the daughters of the leaders from those other countries, but listen. If you read Kings and Samuel clearly and carefully, you will discover that while the kings committed that sin, (in Deuteronomy it said they should not do that) you won't find a single case of polygamy among the commoners. So Jesus' statement here is very important because here's what it means. Although God graciously withheld His judgment on the polygamy of the patriarchs and Israel's kings, that was never God's intention. You want to know God's intention? Go back to the Garden of Eden. Go back to when everything was as it should be and God made one man and one woman and He brought them together in marriage and that was it. So the parameters of marriage are very clear – male and female and only two, one man and one woman.

Now Jesus goes on here in Mark 10 as He unfolds the divine design behind marriage to talk about the permanence of marriage. Verse 7: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother...” In the Old Testament Hebrew word, (He's obviously quoting from Genesis 2:24 here and when you go back into the Hebrew of Genesis 2:24) the word translated *leave* is often translated *forsake*. A man is to forsake his mother and father. What does that mean? I mean, often in Jewish culture, he lived in his parent's house or near his parent's house when he married. What does it mean to forsake them? Well, this means in a relative sense and not an absolute sense. If you are married, you are to be so committed to your spouse that, in comparison, it looks like you have forsaken your closest blood relatives - your parents. Before marriage, your first obligation is to your parents. After marriage, your first priority is to your spouse. Marriage makes a new primary relationship. Your relationship to your spouse is to take priority over your relationship to every other human being including your parents. Look at verse 8: “the two shall become one flesh.” That is a direct quotation from Genesis 2:24. And obviously, ‘one flesh’ is meant to express that which is both permanent and indivisible. Once something has become one flesh, it can't be torn into two again. Marriage is not merely a contract like the contract you have with your bank. It is a vital union in which two people become one.

Look at the second phrase in verse 8: “so they are no longer two, but one flesh.” Notice that's not in all caps. It's because it's not a quotation. This is Jesus' own commentary on Genesis 2. He says marriage so binds two human beings together, body and soul, that they become a part of each other and it's hard to tell where one stops and the other begins. Now folks, this is not merely the ideal. In other words, Jesus isn't saying, ‘You know, if you have a really good marriage it's like this, but if you have a bad marriage it's not like this.’ No, He's saying this is the reality. If you are married, this is the reality. According to Jesus, this happens with every marriage. Verse 9 – Jesus now applies Genesis 2: “Therefore (here is the logical application) what God has joined together...” And that Greek word translated *joined together* literally means

to be yoked together, to share the same yoke. It's really a beautiful picture of the husband and wife working together beside each other sharing the labors of life. But it means that God created marriage to permanently join a man and a woman to each other.

I think there's another implication here as well. I think the implication here is that marriage is not merely a civil arrangement. I don't care if you're a believer or unbeliever, this is true.

Remember, Jesus is talking here to the scribes and Pharisees who were not true believers in the God of Israel. They have embraced the false religion of first century Judaism. He says they were children of hell, but even to them He says God has joined your marriage together. God is involved in every legitimate marriage between a man and a woman. You see: "What God has yoked together (*Jesus said*), let no man separate." No human decision should ever undo the permanent union God has created in marriage. God intends that every human marriage be permanent.

And this is not new with Jesus. Let's go back to the last book in the Old Testament – Malachi. This was some four hundred years before Christ. Malachi is a prophet to those who had returned to the land from Babylonian captivity. And they had a series of, really, accusations against God and He answers each of those accusations. I want you to look at Malachi 2:13. God says,

This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. (*Apparently, they were experiencing not God's blessing, but His judgment. And therefore, they figured God wasn't accepting their offering and they're crying about it. Why? What's wrong with God? Why doesn't He accept it? Verse 14*) You say, 'For what reason?' (*Why would God not accept our sacrifices? And here the Lord explains through Malachi*).

Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

Wow. Now there's a lot in that verse. Let me just point out a couple of things that stand out. Notice, first of all, that here's God's view of marriage. She is your companion. By the way, you go back to Genesis 2, marriage is primarily about companionship. "It is not good for man to be (what?) alone; I will make him a helper suitable to him." She is your companion but, more than that, she is your wife by (what?) covenant. You know what a covenant is? Don't be scared by that word. It simply is a legally binding promise in the context of a relationship. That's a covenant – a legally binding promise in the context of a relationship. God says, 'Listen. You made a legally binding promise to your spouse. When you stand in front of witnesses and you say 'I will' and 'I do,' you are entering into a legally binding promise, a covenant together. You know, we talk about the witnesses of that covenant, the people that are sitting in the auditorium

and that's true. But notice this, verse 14, says "the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth." Listen. You think you're just making those vows before people? No. It is a solemn, legally binding vow before God. And God says I saw when you made that covenant and now you're dealing treacherously.

Verse 15 – this is a very difficult verse to translate and translations vary but I think I prefer the translation here of the NAS:

But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. (*In other words, this is not how people who love and follow God behave*). And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? *Again, very difficult to translate and interpret. I think it may be better to say: 'What's the point of this marriage but a godly offspring?' God wants to influence and impact the world.* 'Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one treacherously deal against the wife of your youth. (*How do you do that? Verse 16, divorce.*) For I hate divorce,' says the Lord, the God of Israel... *Couldn't be any clearer than that, could it? I hate it and you're dealing treacherously if you stand up in front of witnesses and Me as a witness and then you get out of that covenant, you try to get out of that covenant.* 'I hate divorce,' says the Lord, the God of Israel. *And then He uses a very interesting expression:* and him who covers his garment with. . . (*literally with violence*)

It's a word picture. God says, 'Here's how much I hate divorce.' He says, 'Picture for a moment somebody who kills somebody. And as they're killing that person, that person's blood splatters back up on their clothes. And it's like the blood on their clothes testifies about their guilt. God says if you unbiblically, without biblical grounds, pursue divorce, you bear that same kind of guilt. It's as if the blood from the residue of that relationship destroyed, has splattered on you and painted you guilty before God. Wow. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously." God hates it.

Now that should raise a question in your mind. If God hates it, why did He ever permit divorce for any reason? Well, that brings us back to Mark 10:5, remember? "Jesus said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.'" He permitted it because of your hard heart. To be hard-hearted in Old Testament terms means to rebel against God's Word and will. So how exactly were they being hard-hearted? How were they rebelling against God's Word and will? Well, they were refusing to stay in their marriages. The people were divorcing so God had to regulate divorce for the purpose and protection of the spouse who had not initiated the divorce. So God permitted it because He was intending to protect the person who may be harmed through this sinful activity.

But I think there's another way they were hard-hearted and therefore divorce was allowed. I think it's because they refused to execute the guilty party when there was adultery. It was commanded. Leviticus 20:10, listen to it: "If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress (*both parties*) shall surely be put to death." Wow. And Deuteronomy 22 says they were to be stoned. Now we know from Old Testament history that that happened on occasion but didn't usually happen. It was not the customary practice. And even by the time you come to David of course, David was not commanded to be stoned and, and on through the Old Testament times. If the guilty party, however – go back to Old Testament times. If the guilty party had been stoned as God commanded, then divorce would've been unnecessary. But their hard-hearted refusal to stone the guilty party made divorce necessary in order to legally end the marriage and allow the innocent party to get out of the marriage and to be able to remarry. So clearly then, listen carefully. To initiate an unbiblical divorce, even without remarriage, is a sin. God forbids it. According to Christ: "What God has joined, let no man separate." And Malachi 2, God hates it. Boy. When you put together the various passages in which our Lord teaches on the subject of divorce and remarriage, you can immediately begin to see the seriousness of unbiblical divorce, the seriousness of it.

Now let's go back to Matthew 5. I want you to see what our Lord teaches here. Our Lord makes three basic points here and in one other passage about the seriousness of unbiblical divorce. Number one: in remarriage, the wife whose husband divorced her without biblical grounds commits adultery. The wife, if she remarries, commits adultery. Notice verse 32: "but I say to you (*again Jesus here speaks as the authoritative interpreter of the Old Testament. He says don't listen to what the scribes and rabbis taught. Let Me tell you what it really means*) everyone who divorces his wife (*God doesn't show partiality. This would be true of me. It would be true of you. It would be true of anyone. This is a universal truth.*) Everyone who divorces his wife ...makes her commit adultery." Now in one sense, this divorced wife is the victim of her husband's sin. I think that's why Jesus says it the way He does. He says the husband who initiated the unbiblical divorce makes her commit adultery. He bears some of this responsibility as well, but now she does. Why? Well, in the culture of the first century, a woman only had several ways to support herself. She either was supported by her husband or if she were divorced as this woman now is, she could return home and be supported by her parents. Or thirdly, she could marry another man. Some women returned home and were supported by their parents, but most women, having been sinfully divorced, would have been tempted to do what? To pursue another marriage. And by remarriage, Jesus says, when there were no biblical grounds for the divorce in the first place, the woman who was sinned against in the divorce now sins herself in remarriage. And Jesus says she bears the moral guilt of adultery.

Now there's a second point He makes here. In the last part of this verse, He makes this point. In remarriage, the new husband of the wife who was divorced without biblical grounds also

commits adultery. Notice verse 32: “whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” That doesn’t mean any divorced woman. If the exceptions are met, as we’ll see next week, this wouldn’t be true. He’s talking about if the exceptions aren’t met. If there aren’t biblical grounds, then the new husband who marries that woman who was unbiblically divorced commits adultery as well.

Now there’s another point Jesus makes, but not in this passage. Turn over with me to Matthew 19. And here we discover that in remarriage, the man who initiated all this divorce unbiblically – if he remarries, he commits adultery. Look at verse 9, “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, *(that’s the same Greek word that is translated unchastity back in chapter 5, same exception.)* I say, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality and marries another woman, he commits adultery.” Now Jesus has already established that divorce without biblical grounds is a sin even if neither remarries. Now He adds that remarriage adds yet another sin – “whoever divorces his wife... and marries another woman.” Here’s a man who legally ends his first marriage and then legally enters into another marriage. Even though he is legally married to another woman, Jesus says he commits adultery. Literally, he is committing adultery. While in this second marriage, he is in a constant state of adultery. The Greek word translated ‘adultery’ occurs twenty-seven times in the New Testament. It always refers to sexual sin by a married person with someone other than his spouse. Jesus says this man is committing adultery against his first wife as long as he is unrepentant in that second marriage. What our Lord means is that the man who divorces his wife and remarries without biblical grounds bears the same moral guilt before God as if he had actually been unfaithful to his spouse while he was married. Instead of being a holy marriage, that second marriage is the moral equivalent of an ongoing marital affair. And that couple, even though legally married, continues to live in ongoing adultery, and this is key, until there is genuine repentance.

And by the way, this is true for both men and women. The texts we’re looking at all talk about the man divorcing because in Jewish culture the woman really never did. But when Mark writes, and he’s writing to a Roman audience where women did initiate divorce, he says that our Lord included women as well. So it doesn’t matter who initiates. It’s true of both man and woman. So then, the one who initiated the divorce, the one who was divorced and those who remarry either spouse – they all commit adultery if the divorce was not for biblical grounds and if they remarry.

Now that’s hard to hear. It’s hard to say in our culture, but that’s what Jesus taught. That’s what the text says. The question then is why. Why does God so hate divorce? You know, I think the primary reason is that it is a violation of His own character. Think about it. God always keeps His promises. When God enters into a covenant relationship with anyone, He never, ever breaks that covenant. I love this about our God.

You remember --in fact there's a Hebrew word you need to know. Some of you have been around a while. You know this word. In our New American Standard version in the Old Testament, it's translated as 'lovingkindness.' That's a terrible translation. But whenever you come across that word, what I want you to know is the Hebrew word behind that in the New American Standard, 'lovingkindness' or 'lovingkindnesses,' that word is really composed of three parts. It is love and it is loyalty and it is in the relationship of a covenant. That's what that word, it's the Hebrew word is 'chesed,' lovingkindness. It means, we could translate it this way: unfailing love in a covenantal relationship or unfailing covenantal love. That's really what it means. And what did God say about Himself in Exodus 34:6 when He revealed Himself to Moses? He said I am abounding in (what?) 'chesed,' in lovingkindness. I have more than enough unfailing covenantal love. Deuteronomy 7:9 – “the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His ‘chesed’ (*His unfailing covenantal love*) to a thousandth generation of those who love Him and keep His commandments...” Listen, folks. We have a God who, when He makes a covenantal promise, a legally binding promise in the context of a relationship, He never, ever, ever breaks it. Psalm 100:5: “For the Lord is good; His ‘chesed’ (*His unfailing, covenantal love*) is everlasting and His faithfulness to all generations.” Did you know God has made a covenant with you if you're in Christ? Hebrews 8 calls it (what?) the new covenant. God has made legally binding promises to you. He has entered into a relationship with you in which He has promised to be your God and for you to be His child. And when God makes a covenantal promise, when He says ‘I do’ and ‘I will,’ He never, ever breaks it. “His ‘chesed’ is everlasting and His faithfulness to all generations.” You come to the New Testament. First Corinthians 1:9 – “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Listen. When He called you into fellowship with Himself and through His Son, He made legally binding promises to you in the new covenant and God will never break His word. He will never break that covenant. And when we break our marriage covenant without biblical grounds, we don't merely sin against our spouse. We sin against God because we violate something that is part of the essence of who God is.

This is true, by the way, of both believers and unbelievers – doesn't matter. And when we who are His children break our marriage covenant, we not only violate our own promise but we lie about God's covenant loyalty. We are telling others, ‘Listen. I'm a child of God and my Father does exactly what I do. He feels perfectly comfortable making binding promises and then breaking those covenants. He'll leave you. He'll be unfaithful to you if He finds something better.’

Now don't miss the context in Matthew 5. Jesus has showed us with lust and anger a truth that He's now showing us with an unbiblical divorce. If you unbiblically divorce, if without biblical grounds you divorce, you could be found guilty in a human court of having violated the seventh commandment against adultery, if the intention of God was carried out in that human court. And ultimately, just as with anger and lust, an unbiblical divorce will render a person guilty before

God in the divine courtroom. And without repentance, adultery, either in sexual sin overtly, or in an unbiblical divorce, will be a damning sin. In fact, Paul says that explicitly in 1 Corinthians 6:9. He says, Listen. Don't you deceive yourself. No adulterer will enter the kingdom of God. And then he says, and I love this: "but such were some of you; but you have been washed. . ." You have been cleansed. Listen. Your only hope over the sin of adultery is the forgiveness that's found in Jesus Christ. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new (what?) creation." He's a new creation. That's your only hope.

What about for us who are believers? Listen. Jesus is saying that we must strive to keep the seventh commandment not only in external conformity, but also in our hearts when it comes to lust and in our marriages by not pursuing an unbiblical divorce. The reason there are two small exceptions is that there is one massive rule – God hates divorce. It was never the divine intention. "What God has joined (*Christ says*), let no man separate." Apart from the biblical exceptions, it is a sin against God to divorce. And to enter into another marriage without biblical grounds is to be involved in adultery. Now maybe you're a Christian and you say, 'I have an unbiblical divorce in my background.' Well, the good news for you is that because it is a sin and Jesus is clear that it's a sin, there is forgiveness for that sin just as there is for any other. Let me encourage you. If you have never seen the seriousness of that unbiblical divorce and you've never really done this, before this day is over, get alone with God, fall down on your face, acknowledge that you sinned against His original design and His purpose, that you took matters into your own hands, you did what you never should have done, confess that sin to God and plead for His forgiveness. And I can promise you that if you'll do that, He will respond with forgiveness, because He said He would. "If we confess our sins, He is (*what?*) faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

You say, 'What if I unbiblically divorced and now I'm in another marriage?' Listen. If you're in another marriage, you believe in the Lord's promise of forgiveness and you commit to that spouse to whom you are now married to do and be everything you should have done and been in the first. You commit to love your current spouse and to be devoted that spouse for life as our Lord commands.

And if you are married and have never been divorced, let me encourage you to reaffirm to your spouse that you, before Christ, are committed to your marriage for life. And whatever you do, when you get into disagreements, when you get into an argument, don't pull out the 'D' word as a club to beat your spouse with because James says that the tongue is like a rudder. You ever thought about this? The tongue is a rudder. In other words, it directs the ship. If you think divorce often enough and if you say divorce often enough, you'll convince yourself that it's okay and you will someday do it. Commit yourself to your marriage for life. Whatever problems may come, short of the biblical exceptions, you will honor Christ and you will work it out – one man,

one woman, for life. Jesus says that's the divine design and anything else slanders the character of our God. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for this passage. It's a hard one in our culture as You know. But Father, help us to see that our Lord's teaching here was every bit as much out of step with the first century as it is today. And therefore, we have no excuse but to obey. Lord, help us to understand what we need to do. I pray for those who are not in Christ. Lord, help them to see that this is just another sin that adds to the list of sins that will one day be brought up against them and send them to eternal hell. Father, may this be the day that they seek true forgiveness in Jesus at the cross. May they be willing to turn from their sin and put their faith and trust in Christ alone.

Father, I pray for the believer here who, who has sinned in this way. Father, may they genuinely see the seriousness of this sin and may they cry out for Your forgiveness and find the forgiveness that's found in the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank You that You put our sins behind You. You cast them into the deepest sea. You never bring them up against us again forever. And Father, I pray for those who are in marriage now. Lord, help us to be committed to our spouse - mind and body. And Father, I pray that You would help us not merely to be content with gritting it out and staying together but, Father, may we pursue marriage as You intended for it to be – a beautiful picture of Christ and His church. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.