

Matthew
Jesus' Teaching On Divorce & Remarriage (Part 2)
Matthew 5:31-32
April 19, 2026

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It was back in 1985 that a man, named Robert Bella, wrote a book, a bestseller, called *Habits of the Heart*. Now, remember, this is 1985, and this is what he wrote then about what was going on in Christianity. “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 one who helps us find happiness and fulfillment.” It's so true. Back in that time period, Christians began to think of Jesus as “Someone who simply made me happy; He exists to make me happy.” And the problem with that is that kind of self-fulfillment, ultimately, became deadly when it comes to the permanence of Christian marriage because here's how Christians began to think: “Jesus, above everything, wants me happy. I'm not happy in my current marriage, and so clearly, He doesn't want me to stay in my current marriage. He has something else that will make me happier.”

Sadly, it was in my generation, in that time period that I've just described, that Christians began to take unbiblical divorce and unbiblical remarriage lightly. But it happened because of a larger cultural shift. In the 1970s, in the late 1970s, there was a huge legal shift in our country to what has been called “No-fault divorce.” Before 1975, the secular courts treated marriage as a binding covenant, and they sought to preserve marriage except when there was adultery, cruelty, or desertion. But starting with the late 1970s and the rise of no-fault divorce, courts began to treat marriage, instead, as a voluntary contract that either party could end for any reason. That's why today, the legal reason that is cited in over 70% of divorce cases in our country is “Irreconcilable differences,” a ubiquitous term that can simply mean, “I don't want to be in this marriage anymore.”

Folks, it doesn't matter what our legal system says. It doesn't matter what our culture says about divorce. It doesn't matter what you say or even what I say about divorce. If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, all that matters is what Jesus says. And that's what we're learning in Matthew, chapter 5. Let's read it again together, just two verses. Matthew, chapter 5, verses 31 and 32. You follow along; these are the words of our Lord: "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."

In those two short verses, we're learning this basic truth, and that is, "Without biblical grounds, divorce and remarriage violate the seventh commandment against adultery." And as Jesus' disciples, "We must be fully committed to our marriage covenant." Now, here, Jesus provides three authoritative observations about what the Scripture teaches regarding divorce and remarriage. Last week, we considered just the first of those observations, "The Corruption of the Old Testament Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage." Verse 31 teaches us "What the Scribes of Jesus' Time Taught." Notice verse 31. "It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE.'"

Now, the scribes actually combined two phrases from Deuteronomy 24 to summarize what they believed the Old Testament taught about divorce. They believed that Moses allowed divorce and remarriage, but there was a great debate about the legitimate grounds. And that debate centered on an expression in Deuteronomy 24, specifically, "indecent in her (anything)." And as I noted for you last time, *The Jewish Mishnah* records that there were several views in the first century about the legitimate grounds for divorce based on that expression. But in the end, the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus is interacting with, they mostly taught Hillel's view, the Rabbi Hillel's

view, that Moses allowed divorce for any reason at all; for any reason at all. That was their flawed view.

But last week, we also considered “What the Old Testament Taught,” specifically in Deuteronomy 24. We learned that Deuteronomy 24 is not primarily teaching biblical grounds for divorce. In fact, it doesn't even comment on the morality of divorce; it simply regulates one very specific circumstance. And that is, if there's a marriage ended by divorce, both parties remarry, can they then, after that second marriage, can they marry again in a third marriage? That's the question in Deuteronomy 24. However, since Jesus says that Deuteronomy 24 permitted divorce in a circumstance, it certainly left open the possibility of legitimate reasons for divorce and remarriage. The problem, however, was that the scribes and Pharisees held a lax view of the Old Testament's teaching, and essentially taught the same as our 21st century view in the U.S. of no-fault divorce—divorce for any reason.

Now today, that brings us to a second authoritative observation here in our text. It is “Jesus' Exposition of the Old Testament Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage,” Jesus' exposition of what the Scriptures say about marriage, about divorce, and remarriage. Let's 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, let me first of all point out the obvious. In that sentence, there is what is called “an exception clause.” Notice the exception clause, “except for the reason of unchastity.” Now, that's important, and as we'll study in detail next week, Scripture does provide two legitimate biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage. The first reason is sexual sin of your spouse with another entity; sexual sin by your spouse with another entity. That's in Matthew 5; that's in Matthew 19. The second legitimate grounds for divorce and remarriage is abandonment by an unbeliever.

That's found in 1 Corinthians 7. Lord willing, we will look at both of those exceptions in detail next week.

But the exception clause here in our text, verse 32, is not Jesus' main point. To get the full impact of what is His main point, read verse 32 again without the exception clause. Look at it; here is His main point, "But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." Jesus is teaching that all divorce and remarriage without legitimate biblical grounds violates the Seventh Commandment against adultery. That's what He says. Now this is part of what Jesus had to say about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. I noted for you last week that Jesus actually addresses these topics three times in the Gospels. The first time is here in "The Sermon on the Mount," probably preached in the late fall of 28 A.D. And then there was a second time, I went there with you last week, to Luke 16:18. He briefly mentions it, likely a year later, a year after "The Sermon on the Mount," in the winter of 29 A.D. The third time that Jesus addresses these issues is in two parallel passages, Mark, chapter 10, and Matthew 19. These happen in the spring of 30 A.D., in fact, just a week or two weeks before His death and resurrection. It happens as He's on His way to Jerusalem for the final Passover, for the Passion Week.

Now we're going to come back to our text here in "The Sermon on the Mount," but I first want to study again our Lord's most complete teaching on this passage, which happened just a week or two weeks before His death. As I said, it's recorded in two places, Mark 10; Matthew 19. I want you to turn with me to Matthew 19; Matthew 19. And the reason I want to come here again is before we look at divorce and remarriage, I want to make sure we have a correct picture of marriage. Because Jesus really begins here in Matthew 19 by unfolding "The Divine Design of Biblical Marriage." And here's how it came up. Look at Matthew 19:3, "*Some Pharisees came to*

Jesus, testing Him and asking, ‘Is it lawful *for a man* to divorce his wife for any reason at all?’”

That was their view. They're basically saying, “Will you affirm the common view of the rabbis and scribes?” Notice in response, Jesus takes them back to the creation, verse 4, “from the beginning.” So Jesus goes back and He says, “Let's look, before we look at divorce, let's look at marriage.” And Jesus points out several things here about the divine design of marriage. Let's consider them together.

First of all, He points out that “God created the institution of marriage.” The reality of marriage exists by a creative act of God. Look at verse 4:

And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, ‘FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH?’”

Jesus quotes in the male and female part of that, He quotes Genesis 1:27. And then in the part about marriage, He quotes Genesis 2:24. He takes us back to the creation before the fall. Why? His point here is that marriage is not something that mankind created. No, God established marriage. And He created marriage when there were only two people on the planet. If you're married, your marriage and the marriages around you, if they're legitimate marriages between a man and a woman, they are, in fact, God's idea. He created marriage. That's why we marry. So God created the institution of marriage.

But Jesus also explains here, as He continues to unfold this divine design, that “God determined the priority of marriage.” Verse 5, “FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE.” “HE SHALL LEAVE.” In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for ‘leave,’ in the passage Jesus is quoting here, is often translated as ‘forsake.’ “A man shall

forsake his father and mother.” Not in the absolute sense that you abandoned them, you have no more connection with them, but in the relative sense. In other words, here's what Moses said and what Jesus is reaffirming, “You are to be so committed to your spouse in marriage that, in comparison, it looks like you have forsaken your closest blood relatives.” You don't forsake them. You need to love them. You have responsibilities for them. You have ongoing interactions with them. But comparatively, that's what it looks like. Marriage brings a new primary relationship. Your relationship to your spouse is to take priority over all other human relationships, even that with your parents. Some couples have trouble with this, but this is what Moses taught; it's what Jesus reaffirms. Before marriage, your first obligation is to your parents, but afterwards it's to your spouse. Again, that doesn't mean that you don't enjoy them, relate to them, have meals together, all of those things that go with being a family. It's talking about priority, and God established that priority.

Jesus points out thirdly that “God determined the boundaries of marriage.” That is, He established what makes a legitimate marriage. First of all, in verse 4, it's between male and female, “Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE?” Jesus is quoting from Genesis 1:27. That says this, “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” Now, we live in a day when there's a lot of debate about sex and gender, and they're treated as though they're two different things. That's not what the Scripture does, ever! You are male or female, and God assigned that to you in the process of allowing you to be formed and shaped in your mother's womb. To take any other path is to essentially rebel against God's providence in your life. If you have questions about this, I did a series called “The Question of Gender.” You can go back and listen to it. Scripture's very clear about this. The point here is when God chose to make mankind

male and female in a way that they physically correspond to each other, He made it clear that marriage would be between male and female. And that's exactly what He did when He created the first marriage.

This is so clear, frankly, that we use this language every day. If you have a plumbing problem in your house, and I hope that never happens to you, but if it happens, you go to Home Depot, and when you get to Home Depot, you will find that there in the store, the plumbing parts are designated as male and female. Why? That's to show that they're made for each other, that they fit together. Two males don't work. Two females don't work. It takes a male and a female to complete the union. That's the reality in plumbing; that's the reality in marriage. God made mankind male and female because He designed marriage to be between male and female. That's the boundary that God Himself established. Jesus adds here that it's between "One Man and One Woman." Notice verse 5, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH," so they are no longer two, Jesus says, but "one flesh."

Now, of course, if you're thinking with me, this raises a question. If you're familiar with your Bibles, you know that there were some of the patriarchs, for example, who were into polygamy. So what do we do with that? How do we know that God forbids polygamy if He allowed it with some of the folks in the Bible? Maybe we should be more Mormon-like and have multiple spouses. How do we know that? Well, there are "Clear Biblical Arguments against Polygamy." I'm not going to develop them but let me give you some of them. There are others but let me give you some primary biblical arguments against polygamy.

Number one, "Before the fall, and that's key, God created marriage for two people." Go back and read the story, Genesis 2. He created only one woman for Adam, not a harem, not two, not

three; one, and He performed the first wedding. Genesis 2:24, in founding the reality of marriage, speaks of a man and his wife, singular, the two of them becoming “one flesh.” That was the divine design before the fall.

Secondly, “Jesus, here in our text, explicitly reaffirms the creation model of two.” He says, “THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.” Verse 6, “So they are no longer two, but one flesh.” Jesus' statement here is very important, and it means that although God graciously withheld judgment on polygamy in the Old Testament, it was never the divine intention. His design from creation was always for two, and only two to become one.

Number three, “The Old Testament records the pagan start of polygamy, and it consistently reports the conflict that it causes.” You see, the first case of polygamy is in the reprobate line of Cain, Lamech the murderer, he was the one who first took two wives, Genesis 4, verse 19. And as the Old Testament history unfolds, when true believers like the patriarchs engaged in polygamy, the Scripture always documents a consistent pattern, and that pattern is division and jealousy and destroyed relationships. If you doubt that, just read the second half of Genesis.

Number four, “The Mosaic law regulated polygamy to minimize its harm, but it never condones it.” I've given you several passages where God does that to protect, particularly the woman, in the case that that happens (Ex. 21:10; Deut. 17:17; 21:15-17).

Number five, “The New Testament elder, who is an example of Christian maturity—must be a ‘one-woman-man.’” You know, every person, every Christian is to be pursuing the character qualities that mark an elder. It's not that, except for teaching, the rest of them are character qualities we all should pursue. And so that's the standard of Christian maturity. And the New Testament elder in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6, we're told, must be a “one-woman kind of

man.” Obviously, that means he's faithful to his wife, but it certainly includes that he has one wife.

Number six, “Marriage pictures the relationship of Christ and His one bride, the church,” according to Paul in Ephesians, chapter 5:31-32. So clearly then, the boundaries of marriage are male and female, and one man and one woman.

Next, in Matthew 19, Jesus teaches us that “God established the primary purpose of marriage,” the primary purpose of marriage. Look at verse 5, “THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.” Now again, that's a direct quotation from Genesis 2:24, and “one flesh” pictures that which is indivisible, and therefore, permanent. Verse 6, consequently, “they are no longer two, but one flesh.” That's Jesus' own commentary on Genesis 2. What Jesus says is, “Marriage so binds two human beings together, body and soul, that they become part of each other. They become one.” It's hard to tell where one stops and the other begins. And Jesus says this isn't merely the ideal, this is a reality to some extent in every legitimate marriage—“one flesh.” But why? What is God's purpose for that one flesh? What is God's purpose for marriage?

It is clearly stated for us in Genesis, chapter 2, verse 18. Listen to what Moses writes, “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.’” Did you hear that? God said, “I'm going to make woman because it's not good for man to be alone.” The primary purpose for marriage is lifelong companionship. That's the reason marriage exists. If you have something else in your mind as to why marriage exists, you've missed it altogether. God said that's the main reason He created marriage, lifelong companionship. It exists primarily to address human loneliness. Proverbs 2, verse 17 describes a spouse as “the companion of her (one's) youth.” Malachi 2, verse 14 says “the wife of your

youth” is “your companion.” Listen, if you've got some other idea in your mind about why marriage exists, you need to come back to the Scripture. You need to realize that your marriage exists for you to be a companion to your spouse to answer human loneliness.

So, let me ask you a question, “Husband, wife, how are you doing with meeting that most basic primary purpose for marriage? Other priorities causing your spouse to be lonely when they shouldn't be?” God designed marriage for companionship, so a husband and wife become one in every area of their relationship.

Jesus also explains, fifthly, that “God ordained the lifelong permanence of marriage,” and He accomplished that in two ways. First of all, “By making marriage itself a covenant.” Did you realize that? Your marriage, if you're married or one day will be, your marriage is a covenant made with each other, and here's the surprising part to many, and with God Himself. Malachi, chapter 2, verse 14, as Malachi is dealing with the misuse of marriage, he says this, “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,” there's the companionship angle, and, listen to this, “she is your wife by covenant.” What is a covenant? They are simply legal binding promises made in the context of a relationship. That's a covenant. Legally binding promises made in the context of a relationship. That's your marriage. You are in that marriage by covenant with your spouse.

But it's more than that, because Proverbs 2:17 says, an unfaithful wife “leaves the companion of her youth,” and listen to this, “and forgets the covenant of her God.” You see, marriage is a covenant made with your spouse, legally binding promises you make to your spouse, and it's a legally binding promise you make with God. Jay Adams puts it this way: “Marriage is a formal,

covenantal arrangement between two persons to become each other's loving companions for life. In marriage, they contract to keep each other from ever being lonely so long as they shall live.” God made marriage a covenant of companionship, and He commands that we faithfully keep our covenant. We understand this. Think about your marriage vows. If you've made marriage vows that are in any way related to the traditional marriage vows, which reflect the Scriptures, and I urge you to do that, by the way. A lot of modern marriage vows are, you know, they're fine, they're whimsical, but they don't reflect what the Scriptures say about marriage. But here are the traditional marriage vows, and they make it very clear.

Do you take this woman to be your wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holiest state of marriage? (And here it is.) and do you solemnly promise before God and these witnesses that you will love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, and forsaking all others, keep only to her so long as you both shall live?

That's what God expects. Your marriage, God has made a covenant, and it's sealed as a covenant with your spouse and with God by the promises that you made with witnesses.

A second way that God accomplishes this permanence is “By His actually joining a man and a woman in marriage.” Look at verse 6. Jesus says, “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” This is Jesus' application of Genesis 2. He says, “Therefore,” here's the logical application, “what God has joined together.” Listen, marriage is not primarily a civil contract. God joins a man and a woman in every legitimate marriage, and I say legitimate because it has to be between a man and a woman, but in every marriage, believing or unbelieving, God joins them together. The Greek word that's translated “joined together” here is a beautiful word. It literally means ‘to be yoked together, to share the same yoke.’ He's not describing marriage as some sort of an imprisonment. No, the idea is this; it's a beautiful picture

of a husband and wife working together side by side, sharing all of the joys and the labors of life. Jesus means that God created marriage to permanently join a man and a woman to each other as lifelong companions until death parts them. Jesus adds, notice what he says in verse 6, “what therefore God has joined together (yoked together), let no man separate.” No human decision should ever undo the permanent union that God creates in marriage. He intends that every marriage be permanent, but the Pharisees' lax view of divorce, it influenced everybody. It even influenced Jesus' disciples.

When Jesus finished talking about the permanence of marriage, notice His disciples' response down in verse 10, “The disciples said to Him, ‘If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this (If it's that permanent.), it is better not to marry.’” Maybe some of you here who, that's something you are afraid of. Listen, don't focus on the permanency. Focus on the permanent blessing of companionship, lifelong companionship—that's God's plan and intention. But what I want you to see in verse 10 is that Jesus' teaching on divorce was completely counterculture. Jesus taught these things in times very much like our own, no-fault divorce for any reason.

So this raises another question. If God hates divorce, as Malachi 2:16 says, why did He ever permit it at all? That was the scribe's question. Look at verse 7. They said to him, “Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY?” Why did he do that? “He (Jesus) said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning, it has not been this way.’” This was never God's intention. God permitted divorce only because of their hard hearts, their rebellion against God's revealed will. So why then did God permit divorce? I think there were two primary reasons, we will see a little more about this next week, but two primary reasons He permitted divorce.

Number one, to protect the innocent spouse and perhaps children from harm, to protect the innocent spouse and perhaps children from harm. Listen, God did not allow divorce for the guilty person. In permitting divorce, he wasn't condoning or enabling the sin of the guy who wanted to abandon his marriage for some other woman. No, God allowed divorce to protect the innocent spouse. Number two, He allowed divorce to release the innocent spouse for remarriage. In Leviticus, chapter 20, verse 10, we read, "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 shall surely be put to death." Deuteronomy 22 called specifically for stoning, but when the Israelites, as often happened, refused to stone the guilty, it left the innocent spouse bound to that marriage. If the guilty party had been stoned as God commanded, then divorce would have been unnecessary. They would have been free of that marriage, free to remarry. But the refusal to stone for adultery made divorce necessary to legally end the marriage and allow the innocent party to remarry. So you look at Matthew 19, and you get a glimpse of "The Divine Design of Biblical Marriage." That's what it's about.

But let's go back now to our text in Matthew 5 because here we're going to learn something more, and that is regarding "The Deadly Sin of Unbiblical Divorce and Remarriage." We've seen "The Design by God of Biblical Marriage," now let's consider "The Deadly Sin of Unbiblical Divorce and Remarriage." Now as we go through verse 32, let me just mention to you to keep in mind that Jesus addresses His comments to men. But the same thing is true also for women. How do we know that? Because Mark tells us, Mark 10, verse 12, that Jesus also said, "if she herself (wife) divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery." So in other words, it's addressed to men because that was the problem in that culture,

but it's true for both men and women. It goes both ways, alright? So let's see what Jesus says here. Our Lord makes three moral declarations about just how deadly this sin is.

Number one, “A wife, whose husband divorces her without biblical grounds, commits adultery if she remarries.” Notice verse 32, “but I say to you (Jesus speaks as an authoritative interpreter of the Old Testament.) that everyone, (This is universally true: you're not the exception, I'm not the exception, everyone!) who divorces his wife...makes her commit adultery.” Now in one sense, this wife is the victim of her husband's sin of an unbiblical divorce. That's why Jesus says that the husband who initiated that divorce “makes her commit adultery.” But here's the problem, in the first century culture in Palestine, a woman only had two primary ways to support herself. One of those was to be supported by her husband in marriage. The other, if that marriage ended for whatever reason, was to return home and be supported by her parents. Now some women returned home after divorce, and some women found a legitimate way to support themselves. They had some skills or some business savvy and managed to do that, like Lydia in the Greek culture in the book of Acts. But most women in first century Palestine, having been sinfully divorced, chose to pursue another marriage. And Jesus says that in the case of a divorce without biblical grounds, the woman who was sinned against in the unbiblical divorce sins herself if she remarries. That's what Jesus says. She breaks the command against adultery. That's His first moral declaration.

Second moral declaration, “The new husband of a wife divorced without biblical grounds commits adultery in marrying her.” Notice verse 32, “whoever marries a divorced woman (that woman who's divorced for unbiblical grounds also.) commits adultery.”

There's a third moral declaration Jesus makes. It's not in our text, but it's back in Matthew 19, verse 9, and it's this, "A husband who divorces his wife without biblical grounds commits adultery if he remarries." Listen to Matthew 19:9, "I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." Now you see what's happening here, Jesus has already established that initiating a divorce without biblical grounds is sin, even if there is no remarriage. But now He adds that remarriage, in that case, is also another sin. Notice in verse 9 of chapter 19, "whoever divorces his wife...and marries another woman." Think about this now, what Jesus is saying is, "He legally ends the first marriage, and he legally enters another marriage. But even though this man is legally married to the second woman, he commits adultery." Literally Jesus says, "He is committing adultery." As long as he's in the second marriage, until he repents and seeks God's forgiveness, he's living in a constant state of adultery. Now the Greek word translated 'adultery' occurs twenty-seven times in the New Testament, and always without exception it refers to the violation of the marriage covenant by sexual sin with someone other than one's spouse. So what is Jesus saying here? Think about this. Think about how deadly this sin is. He says:

The man who divorces his wife without biblical grounds and marries another has broken the Seventh Commandment, and he has done so just as truly as if he had been physically unfaithful to her during their marriage. And instead of the second marriage being a good and holy thing, it is the moral equivalent of ongoing adultery. And that couple, though legally married, lives in ongoing adultery until there is genuine heart repentance, (Summary paraphrase).

This is pretty amazing what Jesus says here. It's definitely counterculture. Jesus says if a divorce is not for biblical grounds, and if they remarry, the one who initiated the unbiblical divorce, the

spouse, and their new spouses all commit adultery. Wow! It's a deadly sin. So why? Why is divorce a sin except in the two cases we'll look at next week? Why? For four reasons. Number one, "It violates God's design for marriage." We just saw it in Matthew 19, those "God has joined together (in marriage), let no man separate." That's the design.

Secondly, "It violates our promises to our spouse and to God that we made in the marriage covenant" (Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14). You stood before somebody, and you made promises to each other, and you made promises to God. It violates those promises to end a marriage and divorce.

Number three, "It violates God's character." You see, God is always loyal to those He makes a covenant with—I love that! You know, Deuteronomy 7:9 says, "the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant." Listen, Christian, if you've trusted in Jesus Christ, God's never going to divorce you. You are His, and He's made promises, and He will keep those promises. And for us to do otherwise is to really violate the very character of our God Himself.

Number four, "It violates God's command." Jesus said, "What God therefore has joined together (Here's the command.), let no man separate." When we break our marriage covenant without biblical grounds, we sin against our spouse and God. And that is true whether you are a believer or an unbeliever. An unbiblical divorce violates the Seventh Commandment against adultery and ultimately renders a person guilty before God. And if adultery continues unrepentant, what happens? What's the end? 1 Corinthians 6:9, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither...adulterers will inherit the kingdom of God." So what do you do? You say, "Tom, I have an unbiblical divorce in my background, what do I do about that?" Well, like with all sin, our only hope is the forgiveness that's found in Jesus.

I love what Peter said to Cornelius in Acts 10, verse 43, he says, “Of Him (Jesus) all the prophets bear witness (Listen to this.) that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.” If you're here this morning and you're not a follower of Jesus Christ and God is bringing the weight of your own sin to bear, you've made choices contrary to His purpose and will. Listen, He wants you to trust in His Son. All the prophets spoke of Jesus saying, “If you will believe in Him, you will be forgiven.” God will wipe away your past, He will pardon you, and He will treat you as if you had lived your entire life and kept every covenant promise you've ever made like He does. That's the forgiveness that's found in Jesus. If you will trust His Son who came and lived a perfect life, who died on the cross and who was raised from the dead to purchase forgiveness, and if you'll believe in Him unto that forgiveness, you'll have it. And that's my prayer for you today. That's your only hope; it's my only hope.

But for the rest of us, most of us here are believers, “How should we as believers apply what we've learned this morning?” Let me give you several ways really quickly. Number one, “Embrace God's design for a biblical marriage.” Go back through Matthew 19, walk through it again, see what God has done in marriage. It is a wonderful gift, a covenant of companionship.

Number two, “Commit to your spouse for life;” commit that you're never going to pursue an unbiblical divorce. Now there are two circumstances in which God in His grace to the innocent spouse allows divorce and remarriage. Lord willing, we'll talk about those next week, but don't let those blind you to Jesus' main point here. Apart from those exceptions, divorce is sin; “What God therefore has joined together, let no man separate.” Reaffirm to your spouse that you're committed to him or her for life, and that if problems come, and problems can come up in any marriage, say, “Listen, I want to honor Christ, and I want to love you, and if problems come,

then we're going to work them out together. And if we need help, we're going to get help, but I'm not going to abandon the promises I've made to you."

Number three, "If you're unbiblically divorced or you're married to someone who was unbiblically divorced," Jesus says, "It's adultery." So what do you do? Number one, "You seek God's forgiveness." You see, here's the good news, divorce, like every other sin, is forgivable. Divorce isn't an unforgivable sin; it can be wiped away. If you've never done so in relation to your unbiblical divorce, get alone with God; seek His forgiveness, and He will forgive you. You have His promise in Scripture, 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Seek God's forgiveness.

Number two, "Seek your former spouse's forgiveness." Now let me hasten to say, do this with great care and wisdom. Perhaps the best way to do this is for you to write them a letter that your current spouse, if you've remarried, reads. Maybe a spiritual counselor or mentor reads to make sure you're not getting too intimate even in that letter of apology. But be careful but do it; seek forgiveness.

Thirdly, if it's possible, "Seek reconciliation of that marriage, if neither of you is remarried, and if your former spouse is a believer. Then pray about it, seek counsel, pursuing reconciliation.

And fourthly, if you say, "That's not possible; we've remarried." Then what do you do? What do you do if you were involved in an unbiblical divorce and you've remarried? Well, believe the Lord's promise of forgiveness; don't live in guilt. Love your current spouse with all your heart and be devoted to your current marriage for life. That's what repentance looks like for you. One man, one woman for life. Jesus says that is God's design for marriage!

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for how clearly Your Word speaks to the issues of our lives. Lord, I pray for us who are followers of Christ that You would give us a renewed resolve to be committed to the covenant promises we made to You and to our spouse. Father, I pray that You would protect us from unbiblically divorcing our spouses and unbiblically remarrying someone else. Father, help us to care what You say and to want to obey You.

And Father, for those who maybe already have, help them to seek the forgiveness that You offer. Thank You that You are a forgiving God, that You're a Savior, that You forgive sins, iniquities and transgressions. Father, we thank You and I pray that they would seek that even today. And Lord, I pray for all of us that we would recommit ourselves to the divine design for marriage, its priority, its permanence, its beauty, the covenant of companionship, lifelong companionship as a remedy for loneliness. Father, thank You for Your good gifts. Help us to love and treasure them. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.