

Matthew
Jesus' Teaching On Divorce & Remarriage (Part 3)
Matthew 5:31-32
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Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

In 2010, William Doherty, of the University of Minnesota, surveyed some 886 couples who were pursuing divorce. And he asked those couples, nearly 1,000 of them, to give all of the reasons behind their divorce. Here are the top six reasons that were given. And reason number one, we've simply grown apart, 55%. Number two, we are unable to communicate well, 53%. How my spouse handles money, 40%. The spouse's personal problems, 37%. Not enough attention, I'm presuming, to the marriage and probably to each spouse, 34%. And infidelity, 34%.

Now the question I want us to ask this morning is, "Are any of those biblical grounds for divorce and ultimate remarriage?" That's the question that Jesus answers for us today in "The Sermon on the Mount." Let's read again, Matthew 5, verses 31 and 32. You take your copy of God's word and follow along as I read. Matthew 5:31, 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."

Now what we're discovering in these two brief verses is that 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. Here, Jesus provides some authoritative observations about what the Scripture teaches on this issue of divorce and remarriage. Let me remind you of what we've seen and discovered so far.

First of all, we saw “The Corruption of the Old Testament Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage.” Verse 31, “It was said, ‘WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE.’” As I noted, that's not a direct quote from the Old Testament, but rather it's a combination of phrases, two phrases, from Deuteronomy 24 that the scribes and the Pharisees had joined together to sort of make their own prescription about divorce and remarriage. And when it came to the biblical grounds for divorce, we discovered that most of the scribes and Pharisees in the first century taught Rabbi Hillel's view, and that was that Deuteronomy 24 allowed for divorce for any reason at all. That was the corruption of the Old Testament teaching.

Now, last week, we began to consider “Jesus' Exposition of the Old Testament Teaching on Divorce.” We began, not in our text, but I took you to Matthew 19, and there we saw Jesus’ teaching on “The Divine Design of Biblical Marriage.” In that passage, Jesus affirms Genesis and what it teaches. He affirms that God created marriage. It's not a human invention, a human construct. It is a creation of God Himself, and He created it to be a covenant of companionship to address the loneliness of man. He designed marriage, when He created it, to be between one man and one woman for life, a lifelong blessing of companionship; that was the intent. That's why in Matthew 19:6, Jesus said this, “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” That was the divine design behind biblical marriage.

Now, we ended last week by studying what Jesus then said about “The Deadly Sin of Unbiblical Divorce and Remarriage.” This is in our text, Matthew 5, verse 32. In speaking to the issue of unbiblical divorce and remarriage, Jesus makes three moral declarations; we looked at them last time. Let me just remind you of them. First of all, he makes it clear that “A wife, whose husband divorces her without biblical grounds, commits adultery if she remarries.” Verse 32, “everyone

who divorces his wife...makes her commit adultery” in the remarriage. Secondly, we discovered that “The new husband of a wife divorced without biblical grounds also commits adultery in marrying her.” Notice what Jesus says in the second half of verse 32, “Whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” Thirdly, and this is not in verse 32, but in Matthew 19, verse 9, we learn that “The husband who divorces his wife without biblical grounds, he also commits adultery if he remarries.” Here's 19:9, “whoever divorces his wife...and marries another woman commits adultery.” So this is a deadly sin. It spreads like a contagion through relationships. Unbiblical divorce and marriage make the original man and his wife and their new spouses all guilty of adultery. That's what Jesus teaches.

Now that's where we left off last time. I want to study the exception clause today in Matthew 5, but before we do that, I first want to lay out the differing views among Christians about this issue of divorce and remarriage. By the way, let me just prepare you for this. I think many of you know that we use the slides on Sunday morning because they asked me to do it for the kids' sake so the kids could learn to take notes and you could help them, parents, to do that. I know some of you adults have become dependent on them as well. Today, I'm going to give you a lot of slides because I want you to read these things with me so that they're clear, and I want them to be attached to this sermon in the future online, where those who listen, they can also follow along and be clear. So, let me just prepare you for that.

So let's look then at the “Differing Views among Professed Christians on this issue of Divorce and Remarriage.” Despite the apparent clarity of Jesus' statement here, Christians differ widely on what the Bible teaches regarding the biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage. Let me give you “The Four Primary Views about Divorce and Remarriage.” View number one, “No divorce and no remarriage for any reason at all.” That's view number one. This is still, by the

way, the official view of the Roman Catholic Church, although they often get around it under the label of annulment. But in addition to Roman Catholicism, in my lifetime, there have been several well-known evangelicals who have also held this view, most notably John Piper and Voddie Bauckham. I'll respond to this view in just a moment.

Second view, "Divorce but no remarriage." In other words, the Bible allows for a biblical divorce, but it never allows for a remarriage out of that divorce. They argue that the exception clauses are only grounds for divorce and not for remarriage. And that's because, in essence, they redefine divorce as something less than the true dissolution or ending of the marriage. Now, this view is less common, so I'm not going to spend a lot of time on it. But let me just say this. The Jews of the first century always placed divorce and remarriage together. In fact, as I noted for you last time, the divorce certificate always included the explicit permission to remarry. And so that was how they thought. For them, divorce ended the marriage and it freed the parties to remarry. And Jesus not only doesn't contradict that idea, but He, in fact, underscores it. Now, Jesus does say that an unbiblical divorce or remarriage violates the seventh commandment against adultery, but He still calls that second marriage a marriage. You see, adultery, think of it this way; adultery doesn't end the second marriage any more than adultery would have ended the first marriage. Adultery doesn't end the marriage. It's a violation against the marriage. It's a sin against the marriage, but it doesn't intrinsically end it.

View number three, "Divorce and remarriage are biblically allowed for two reasons—adultery and desertion or abandonment by an unbeliever." This is the view that has been most widely held among Protestants since the Reformation. It's what I believe and teach, it's what the elders and I hold, and I'll defend it shortly.

View number four, “Divorce and remarriage are allowed by the scripture for numerous reasons.” This is definitely a minority position, and it has absolutely no biblical support, because as we have seen, Jesus is teaching here, His whole point is that God hates divorce and doesn't permit it with the exception that He mentions here and one other that Paul will add.

So let me go back now, having shown you the four views, let's go back to view one, “The no divorce and no remarriage,” that is still a minority view among believers, but it has gained popularity because of men like John Piper and Voddie Bauckham, men that we appreciate and respect. So I want to deal with that view for just a moment. I want to briefly mention the arguments they give and briefly answer those arguments. Here are “The Arguments for No Divorce/No Remarriage.” They will say, number one, “Neither Mark nor Luke includes the exception clause.” In other words, it's only here in Matthew 5, in Matthew 19; it's not in Mark, it's not in Luke. That's true. How do you answer that? Well, one answer is to pay attention to the historical setting. We've been learning that Jesus is here correcting the scribes' no-fault view of divorce and remarriage. It wasn't that they didn't believe it was possible, they believed it was possible for every reason. And so Jesus, therefore, intentionally stresses that God hates divorce and He does not allow it in most cases. It doesn't demand including the exception clause to make that point. Jesus does, but He's making the opposite point. Another answer to this argument is that two of the three times that Jesus taught on this issue, He does include the exception clause. Here in “The Sermon on the Mount,” as well as a year later in Matthew 19, which, don't forget, is the parallel passage to Mark 10. On that occasion, Jesus' main point was that God intends marriage to be permanent. But in that setting, Matthew 19 tells us He did include the exception clause. Mark doesn't include it in his Gospel because he can make the point Jesus was making without including that exception.

Argument number two, they say, that it has to be no divorce/no remarriage, because “The exception applies only to betrothal and not to marriage.” Here's John Piper, “The phrase ‘except for immorality’ does not refer to adultery, but to premarital sexual fornication, which a man or a woman discovers in the betrothed partner.” Now, how do we respond to this argument? Well, first of all, look at the three debated passages. Look at Deuteronomy 24, Matthew 5, Matthew 19—none of those mention betrothal. They're all talking about marriage. I think it also, secondly, ignores the historical setting. The debate in the first century was about divorce from a marriage, not divorce during the betrothal. In addition to that, in Jeremiah 3, we're going to see, in a moment, God says He divorced Israel, not during the betrothal period, but after he had married her because of adultery.

Third argument, they say the word translated ‘immorality,’ the word is ‘unchastity’ here, ‘*porneia*,’ that that word ‘*porneia*’ only refers to unlawful marriages with close relatives that are forbidden in Leviticus 18. In other words, they make it really specific. But as I'm going to show you in just a moment, in the first century, this Greek word ‘*porneia*’ was used of all forms of sexual sin.

Argument number four, they say, “Look at 1 Corinthians 7, verses 10 and 11, there, Paul forbids Christians remarrying.” Here's what it reads, “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.” What do we do with that passage? Well, in context, the passage explains what those who have already unbiblically separated or unbiblically divorced should do. They should either remain unmarried or they should be reconciled. It's not talking about the reasons for divorce.

Number five, they say, 1 Corinthians 7:15, a verse we're going to look at in just a few minutes, “does not allow a believer to divorce when an unbeliever abandons the marriage, but rather all it allows is for the unbeliever to refrain from a normal marital relationship.” I'll also deal with that text in a moment. So we'll come back to that.

And reason number six, they say, “Look at church history; several early church fathers taught that remarriage while the former spouse is still living is adultery,” and that's true. However, some of them also taught seriously flawed theology. So the early church fathers are not our standard, the Scripture is.

However, when you look at church history, most theologians and scholars since the Reformation have taught two grounds for biblical divorce and remarriage. Here is the “Westminster Confession of Faith.” The wording is the same in the “2nd London Baptist Confession of 1689.” Listen to this, you read it with me in your heart:

Nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can in no way be remedied by the church or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage (And it talks about how this process should be carried out.): wherein, a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the person concerned in it not left to their own will (their own decision), and discretion, in their own case. (WCF 24.6)

In other words, it's saying that just like elders of the church are involved in initiating marriage and performing the marriage ceremony, in the same way the elders need to be involved in the dissolution of a marriage, assessing whether it's biblical or not. But then the confession goes on to say, “It is lawful for the innocent party to sue [for]divorce and, after the divorce to marry another (And this is key.) as if the offending party were dead.” They're absolutely free from that

first marriage and free to remarry. That's what the bulk of Christian thought has been since the time of the Reformation. So let's see if that's true. Is that what the Scriptures teach?

So let's move on, then, back to our text to consider “The Definitive Grounds for Biblical Divorce and Remarriage,” the definitive grounds for biblical divorce and biblical remarriage. In the end, Jesus does not teach that every divorce is sinful. In fact, Scripture teaches there are two biblical reasons that a follower of Christ can divorce and even remarry with the Lord's blessing. Matthew tells us one exception that our Lord made here, and the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit, adds a second.

So let's look at these exceptions together. The first ground for a believer to divorce and remarry is “Sexual Sin by a Spouse,” sexual sin by a spouse. Look at Matthew 5, verse 32, “but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife (Here it is.), except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery.” Now, where does this exception come from? Does Jesus just sort of invent this off the top of his head? I don't believe so. I think it's based on the Old Testament. There is an exception in Deuteronomy 24:1, we already looked at that text, for sexual sin. I'm convinced that this exception for sexual sin by a spouse has its roots in Deuteronomy 24 where divorce is permitted, you remember for that phrase, “some indecency.”

Now, the two common interpretations of that verse and phrase are that God is allowing divorce for sexual sin short of adultery. This view argues that since adulterers were to be stoned under the Old Testament law, Deuteronomy 24 can't be talking about adultery. So it must mean divorce for some sexual sin short of adultery. Others say, “No, Deuteronomy 24 is allowing for divorce in the case of adultery.” This view argues, and this is where I'm inclined to land, that there is no record in the Old Testament that all adulterers were stoned, or even that all adulterers

were commanded to be stoned. The only clear examples of stoning in the Old Testament were when adulterers were actually caught in the act. Personally, and I can't say this definitively, but personally, I think Deuteronomy 24:1 allows for divorce for adultery when they're not caught in the act, but there is evidence of adultery. Regardless, this is what I want you to get, God allowed divorce, and the implication from Deuteronomy 24 is for sexual sin.

There are also “Biblical examples of divorce for adultery” in the Scripture, there are examples. “Ezra”, Ezra 10, verses 10 and 11, Ezra actually commanded the people who'd returned from the exile to divorce their pagan wives. Why? Well, clearly, because they were influencing the faith, the true faith, but there's a reason. For what reason could they divorce their pagan wives? It was because those wives were involved in literal, physical adultery as part of their idolatrous worship practices. This is what they did. Sexual acts were a part of pagan worship, and so they were adulterers or adulteresses.

Following the Old Testament Law, another example is “Joseph,” the adoptive father of our Lord. In Matthew, chapter 1, verse 19, you remember, “Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her (Mary),” having learned that Mary, in his mind, had to have been unfaithful since she was pregnant, he planned to divorce her secretly—this was during the betrothal. Sexual sin was considered adultery, and it allowed for divorce, and that's exactly what Joseph determined to do until the angel made clear to him what had happened. But he's called “a righteous man,” and he had determined to do this.

Finally, “God Himself” is an example. In Jeremiah 3:6-8, we read this.

The Lord said...“Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there. I thought, ‘After she has done all

these things she will return to Me;’ but she did not return...(And then listen to God.).

For all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away (I divorced her) and given her a writ of divorce.”

God divorced Israel for adultery because their idolatry included physical adultery in their worship. So God Himself established the righteousness of divorcing an unfaithful spouse even under the Old Testament Law. So the exception for sexual sin, then, is based on the Old Testament pattern. That's where it comes from.

But it is explicitly then “Taught in the New Testament” because the exceptions in Matthew are for sexual sin. Let's look at them, Matthew 5, verse 32, “but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife (Here's the exception.), except for *the* reason of unchastity.” Literally, the Greek text says this, “apart from the matter of ‘*porneia*.’” That's the Greek word, ‘*porneia*.’ Keep that word in mind. Now, flip over to chapter 19, verse 9, here's the other exception clause. “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife except for immorality.” Again, literally, the Greek text reads, “not for ‘*porneia*.’” The same Greek word is in the exception clauses in both of those passages. So of course, that invites an important question, “What does that word mean?”

So let's consider “The Meaning of this word ‘*Porneia*,’” translated ‘unchastity’ in chapter 5, translated ‘immorality’ in chapter 19. Let's, first of all, look at *The Septuagint*. Let me just remind you the Septuagint was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. It was done 100-200 years before Christ. It's the Bible they used in the first century. It was in Greek, so they used Greek words. And the Septuagint uses this word ‘*porneia*’ for a variety of sexual sins, including “prostitution (Jer. 2:20; Micah 1:7), premarital sex (Deut. 22:21), and sexual unfaithfulness in marriage (Hos. 2:2).” By the first century, both secular and biblical Greek used ‘*porneia*’ as “an umbrella term for all sexual activity that God's law prohibited.” It's used this

way, for example, by Flavius Josephus. It's used this way by Philo of Alexandria. So, '*porneia*,' then, includes all sexual deviations that the law forbids, deviations such as rape, homosexuality, bestiality, all forms of incest, including marriage to close relatives. This is why "The leading New Testament Greek lexicon" defines like this, it is "all unlawful sexual intercourse" [BDAG]. It includes all unbiblical physical intercourse with another—it's not what happens in the mind; it's what happens with the body. When Jesus uses '*porneia*,' this is what He means.

Now, let's go back to Matthew 5. I keep referring to this expression as an "Exception clause" because that's what it is. We need to consider the nature of an exception clause. In any language, the nature of an exception clause is that if the condition is met, then it negates the rest of the sentence. Let me give you just an example from English. If I said, for example, and this is my own paraphrase of the Texas Penal Code, "If anyone exceeds the posted speed limit, except for on-duty public safety officials, he will be subject to a fine." You heard the exception clause, so what happens if the condition in the exception clause is met? It negates the rest of the sentence. So we could read it like this, "If an on-duty public safety official exceeds the posted speed limit, he or she will not be subject to a fine," right? It negates the rest of the sentence when the condition is met.

So now let's apply that to the divorce exception clauses. Look at Matthew 5, verse 32, "everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of unchastity (or '*porneia*', sexual sin), makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." So let's then read it as if the exception has been met, "If it's for the reason of sexual sin, everyone who divorces his wife does not make her commit adultery, and whoever marries the divorced woman does not commit adultery." Now turn over to chapter 19, verse 9. Let me do the same thing there, "I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality ('*porneia*'), and marries another

woman commits adultery.” Again, if the exception is met, then we can read it like this, “If it's for sexual sin, whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman does not commit adultery.” This is what Jesus is teaching; that's the nature of an exception clause.

Now the question arises in my mind, “Why? Why does God allow this exception? If He hates divorce, why allow this exception?” Well, under Old Testament Law, adultery of every kind, even a single act, particularly if you were caught in the act, could receive the death penalty, and the death of the guilty automatically freed the innocent spouse from the marriage and freed them to remarry, right? If your spouse was guilty of adultery, caught in the act, they were stoned, what happened to your marriage? It was over. It was done, you were free from the marriage, and you were now free to remarry. Well, God, in His grace, allows divorce to protect the innocent party who had been sinned against. Because without divorce, that innocent party is now inextricably bound to that adulterer, with no exceptions, even if they continue to live in wanton adultery. And so God, in His grace, allows divorce for the innocent party.

Now there's one other important point about this exception, and that is Jesus permits divorce, but He doesn't command it. It is possible, even when the marriage has been sinned against with sexual sin, for the spouse, the innocent spouse, to be willing to forgive and to pursue reconciliation, just as God did with Israel in Hosea, when she was unfaithful to Him. So the exception that our Lord gives then, as biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage, is sexual sin by a spouse.

Now under inspiration, Paul adds a second exception, and it is “Abandonment by an Unbeliever.” Turn to 1 Corinthians, chapter 7; 1 Corinthians 7, and look at verse 12. Paul begins with an important comment, he says, “But to the rest I say, not the Lord.” Now don't

misunderstand, it's not like Paul is saying, "You are not responsible to do what I'm about to say, because it's just me." No, what he's saying is, under inspiration, speaking with apostolic authority, "I am about to add something to what our Lord taught about this." What does he add? Let's look at it:

But to the rest, I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise, your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

All he's saying here is, by the presence of a believer in that home, that home is set apart under God's favor and blessing. Now watch what he says. "Yet," verse 15, "if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace."

Now, clearly, we're talking here about the issue of divorce; verse 12 brings that issue up, verse 13, so we're talking about divorce, and there are two conditions that are required, according to Paul here, to meet this exception. Condition number one, this has to be there for this exception to be met, "One spouse is a believer, and the other is an unbeliever," one spouse is a believer, the other is an unbeliever. This isn't about two believers, two unbelievers: it's about one believer and an unbeliever. Now how does a person get the label of an 'unbeliever?' Two ways. Way number one is they simply don't profess or claim to be a Christian. They say, "I don't know Christ, I don't have any interest." They're an unbeliever, right? How, what's the other way that a person can get the label of an unbeliever? It's if that person claims or professes to be a Christian,

but goes through the process of Matthew 18, remains unrepentant of their sin, comes out that process, is put out of the church, and Jesus says, “Treat them as what? Treat them as an unbeliever.” So the two ways a person can be classified as an unbeliever for this text, one of them is they don't claim to be a believer; the other is they've been put out of the church and treated as an unbeliever because of unrepentant sin. That's condition number one. One is a believer, the other's an unbeliever.

Second condition, “The unbeliever abandons the marriage.” Now you'll notice Paul doesn't give a reason in this text. It may be because of the Christian's faith, or it may be because the unbeliever has already become involved with someone else, or it may be that he/she wants to be involved with someone else, or maybe he/she just wants out of the marriage. But it doesn't matter, the reason doesn't matter. The unbeliever abandons the marriage. So how does an unbeliever abandon the marriage?

Two ways: “By physically abandoning the spouse and leaving home,” that's the obvious one, right? Initiating a divorce. But there's a second way that an unbeliever can abandon the marriage, and that is “By expressing or demonstrating a resolve to abandon the marriage.” In other words, he may not physically leave. Why? Because he or she wants to protect their interest in the house, maybe, or the other assets. Or maybe they don't want to appear bad in the eyes of their friends, so they don't want to initiate the divorce. And so they say, “Look, I'm not interested in continuing this marriage, but if it's going to end, you're going to have to end it.” They've still abandoned the marriage. When a believer and an unbeliever are married, and the unbeliever abandons the marriage in either of those ways, notice what Paul says in verse 15, “If the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave.” And then he clarifies what he means in the very next expression, “The brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases,” is not imprisoned or

enslaved. What does he mean? Well, the only bonds in this passage are the bonds of marriage. That's what he is talking about. So he's saying, "If the unbeliever wants to abandon the marriage, they either physically leave, or they make it clear they don't want the marriage anymore, then let them leave. You're not bound to that marriage anymore."

Now, "Why does God allow this ground for divorce and remarriage?" Well, I think it's hinted at at the end of verse 15, "but God has called us to peace." When an unbeliever wants out, trying to preserve the marriage produces only greater conflict. And God isn't asking the innocent, believing spouse to endure that kind of conflict. So Paul says, "Let the marriage end." Now, let me say practically that the believer, in this case, can even initiate the divorce if the unbeliever has already abandoned the marriage but stays in the home or refuses to be the one to initiate the divorce, even though they've made it clear they've abandoned the relationship. So there you have it. There are two biblical grounds for a follower of Christ to divorce and to remarry, sexual sin by a spouse, and abandonment by an unbeliever.

Now, let me deal with another common question. In fact, it's the most common question I've heard in the last couple of weeks. And that is, "Tom, what about physical abuse? Is it grounds for divorce and remarriage?" Well, this is obviously a tragic situation, but let me make several things clear. First of all, let me say that the elders and I always urge a spouse who's experiencing physical abuse to seek immediate safety, get out of any danger and stay away as long as necessary. We argue from the greater to the lesser. Under Old Testament law, a spouse could actually kill their spouse in self-defense. So if that was allowed, then the lesser leaving the home, abandoning the marriage for whatever time is necessary in order to protect and preserve their safety is also allowed. We also encourage them to contact the police and file a complaint. Why? Because Paul says in Romans 13, the government exists to punish evil doers and a spouse

who is physically violent is an evil doer and deserves to be punished by the government. The elders also begin the process of church discipline. Now, stay with me. If after that process of church discipline, we go through all four steps, put him out of the church, if after all of that, he still refuses to repent and to change, then we will do step four. We will put him out of the church and what happens then? We treat him or her as an unbeliever. And if after going through that process, if after being declared an unbeliever, he continues to make it impossible for his spouse to live with him in safety, then I personally fully agree with Calvin and many others that he has, in all intents and purposes, abandoned the marriage and the wife is free to divorce and remarry. Why? Because he's made his choice. He's not willing to make the most basic changes in order to make it possible for her to even live with him in safety. And so he has, by his behavior, abandoned the marriage.

Finally, this morning, I want us to consider “The Practical Implications” of Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage. I want to speak to all of you. By the time I'm done, I hope to hit every person here, alright? What do you do with what we've studied? So let me start with the first group. You have “Never been married.” How do you respond to what we've learned? Number one, “If you believe you have the gift of singleness described in 1 Corinthians 7, then you still need to embrace and to champion God's design for marriage and that it's God's plan that most will marry.” So we're not making you, as a person gifted for singleness, a lesser saint; you are not a second-class person. But don't let that translate into denigrating God's extensive plan for most people. On the other hand, “If you hope to marry, then commit now to marriage for life.” You're not currently married, never married, but you want to be. You need to understand this is Jesus' will for your life. He wants you to enjoy the lifelong blessing of companionship.

Let me speak to a second group here, and that's "You are married currently and there's no divorce in your background." What do you do with what we've learned about all of this? It's very simple. "You resolve to enjoy God's good gift to you in marriage, to love your spouse with all of your heart, and to obey Christ by keeping the covenant that you made with your spouse and with God when you made your wedding vows." That's what Jesus, your Lord, demands of you. Enjoy the blessing He's given you, treat it as the treasure that it is, and keep your promises.

Let me talk to another group here, and that is "If you are divorced, and you divorced with biblical grounds." In other words, your spouse was either unfaithful to you, sexually unfaithful, or was an unbeliever who wanted out of the marriage. What do you do? Well, on a very practical point, although you are not primarily responsible for ending the marriage, it's always right for all of us to search our hearts, to ask the Lord to search our hearts, and to "Confess your sins that may have contributed to the problems in your marriage." Okay? That's legitimate; that's legitimate for all of us. But don't allow false guilt for the divorce and the remarriage if it was, in fact, for biblical grounds. In other words, you don't need to feel guilty. If there were biblical grounds to end your marriage, then God Himself allowed you to do that. It was His protection for you, the innocent spouse. So don't carry around some sort of guilt because of that. And "If you haven't yet remarried, then pursue marriage carefully and with the counsel of the elders."

Group number four. You say, "Tom, I'm here, and I have a 'Divorce in my background without biblical grounds.'" What do you do in that situation? Well, first of all, let me talk to you if you did not initiate the divorce. You need to understand that you are not guilty before God for the divorce. You don't need to feel guilt for that if your spouse divorced you. However, if your sins contributed to the problems in the marriage, then just seek God's forgiveness for those sins and from your former spouse. You didn't end the marriage; your spouse did and bears the guilt for

that. But if there were sins that contributed, then just deal with those sins. If you initiated the unbiblical divorce, what do you do? Well, acknowledge that your divorce, and if you're remarried, your remarriage, was a sin against God and against His design, and seek His forgiveness from your heart. We sang it this morning, "Our God is a compassionate, gracious God who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin." There is forgiveness with God. So, as with all sin, if you will repent, you can know God's full and complete forgiveness. God will wipe away your sin of an unbiblical divorce or remarriage, and He will treat you as if you had been like Him and always kept your covenants. That's the grace of forgiveness. Lloyd-Jones says, "Adultery is not the unforgivable sin." If you truly repent and realize the enormity of your sin and cast yourself upon the boundless love and mercy and grace of God, you can be forgiven. And I assure you of His pardon, but hear the words of our blessed Lord from John 8:11, "Go. From now on sin no more."

So, divorce without biblical grounds, "If neither of you has remarried," what should you do? "Pray for and pursue reconciliation if possible." That's 1 Corinthians 7:10 and 11. If that doesn't happen, "When your former spouse dies, remarries, or becomes sexually involved, then biblically, you are then free to remarry." And let me add, there may be some other considerations that you need to consider and weigh in and just talk with an elder as you are sorting out your individual circumstances.

What if there's been an unbiblical divorce and "You've already remarried?" What do you do then? First of all, "Acknowledge your sin in both the unbiblical divorce, if you initiated it, and in the adultery," in the remarriage that Jesus talks about in Matthew 5. "Express repentance toward God; seek His forgiveness." Again, God forgives a repentant heart. "Wisely seek forgiveness from your former spouse." I mentioned last week, the best way, if you're remarried,

is not for you to go have a private meeting with your former spouse. That's not a healthy thing. Instead, write a letter that your current spouse reads, and spiritual mentors read to help you make sure that it's all as it should be, and then let someone deliver that letter for you or you mail it. And then finally, if you've remarried, you need to commit yourself, body and soul, to be faithful to your current spouse for life. That's what God expects from you. That's what repentance looks like from you. You seek the Lord's forgiveness, and repentance says to your current spouse, "I'm never going to do that again. It won't happen to you. I'm committed to you for life."

Now, if you have other questions about this issue, and it is a complex one, a book that deals with many of the practical issues we've talked about is Jim Neuheiser's book, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*. I just threw the bookstore under the bus here. They probably are sold out. They'll get some more, and you can get it online, but that will be a helpful resource if you want to study this further. You can also talk to one of the elders.

So very briefly then, what have we learned from our study of this topic? Number one, our marriages matter to Christ; your marriage matters to Jesus Christ, and you need to follow His teaching on this, however contrary to our culture or even to your own sinful desires it might be. Secondly, we've learned that God hates divorce, and so our Lord simply does not permit it with two very crucial exceptions. When it comes to the divorce, we must avoid self-righteousness. If you've not had one in your background, listen, we must uphold the biblical teaching, have to practice church discipline if someone is sinning in this way and not repenting, but we must also be eager like our God to forgive and to wholeheartedly, unreservedly receive those who are repentant. And then finally, we've learned that the moral standard that Jesus establishes in Matthew 5; it reminds all of us of our need of the Gospel, because every one of us has fallen

short of God's standard for sexual purity. If not in sexual sin or an unbiblical divorce and remarriage then lust in our hearts, and the only solution to sin is to repent and believe in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, His life, death, and resurrection as your only hope of forgiveness. And if you've already done that, now as a believer, what this passage says is “Strive to be like Christ in your sexual purity in both mind and body.” The goal is not to get as close to the edge as you can, the goal is to be like Jesus in mind and body when it comes to your sexual purity. That's what He demands and expects of us and what He deserves.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for our time, thank You for the clarity of Your Word. Lord, I pray that You would help us not to embrace our own thoughts or the thoughts of the culture we live in, but rather to be committed to our Lord's words, to obeying them, to living like this. Thank You for the amazing gift of lifelong companionship. Help us to love our spouses and to treat them in the way the New Testament describes, to treasure that gift.

And Father, I pray for those who have sinned in these ways, I pray You would help them to honestly confess, repent, seek Your forgiveness, and to know that You always give that forgiveness where there's a repentant heart. And Lord, I pray for those here this morning who don't know You. This hasn't been a Gospel message and yet maybe they've seen their own sinfulness in this study. I pray that You would bring them to repentance and faith even today, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.