

Divorce and Remarriage, Part 3

Scripture: Matthew 5:31-32

Code: 2220

Tonight we're coming to the last in our three-part study of divorce from the text in Matthew 5:31 and 32. And I just want to say this by way of a preface, tonight I'm not really going to preach. This is going to be more like a tightly knit Bible study because we must stay very close to the text and to a logical presentation so that we can clearly understand what God is saying.

Few subjects have had as much confusion about them as this one. So many different things are being taught about divorce. And I'm not here to offer you my opinion, I'm not even, frankly, interested in my opinion but what I am here to do is to try to show you from the word of God what is the clear, lucid word of Scripture regarding this subject of divorce and remarriage. And so I will stick very closely to the notes that I've prepared so that we can move directly through this and that your comprehension, hopefully, will be very clear as we go. Because it's very easy to get lost in dealing with such a very complex theme.

Now may I hasten to add, the complexity of the study of divorce and remarriage is not due to the fact that God isn't clear it's due to the fact that sin has muddled up the world so badly, that we tend to be unable to think in terms of the clarity and the simplicity of the mind of God.

Now let me briefly review what we have been learning already. We first focused on a major point which I entitled "The Teachings of the Scribes and Pharisees". As you know, in Matthew chapter 5 our Lord is confronting the scribes and the Pharisees to show them that their supposed standards of righteousness were inadequate. Now in verse 27 of our text, Matthew chapter 5, the Lord says, "That you have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery". And what He's alluding to there is the fact that they had pretty well kept the legalistic features of adultery, they had not done that. You have been taught you're not to commit adultery, that's been your system of religion and you think that because you don't do the act you're alright. "But I say unto you", in verse 28, "if you ever look on a woman to lust after her you've committed adultery with her already in your heart." And what the Lord is saying to them is - Look, it's not enough to maintain some kind of external; you cannot be righteous before God if you've ever had the thought. You have, maybe, avoided adultery in terms of the external act, technically but you've committed it again and again in your heart.

Now to further illustrate this very same point about adultery He indicates verse 31; "It hath been said," and that He means by that in your religious system, according to your teachers, according to the things you believe, "whosoever shall put away his wife let him give her a writing of divorcement". Now

as I told you, they taught that divorce was valid for any and every reason based on the rabbinic tradition. It was only necessary to be sure you did the paper work. In other words, who ever wants to put away his wife just be sure he gives her a writing of divorcement, make sure you do the paper work, keep the technicalities, abide by the external law and then you'll be righteous before God.

Now this was the dominant view in the time of our Lord. That no matter what a woman did, her husband could divorce her if in his eyes it was for good reason to get rid of her. Now they based this on a wrong interpretation of Deuteronomy chapter 24. In Deuteronomy chapter 24 it tells about a man who had a wife and he found in his own eyes some uncleanness in her, the Talmud translates the word - obnoxious. Something that she did he didn't like. So he decided to divorce her. But the way the rabbis interpreted the verse they turned it into a command. And they said there was a man who found in his wife an uncleanness - let him divorce her. And they turned around the meaning of the Scripture to force that there be a divorce. So according to the Jewish tradition of interpreting Deuteronomy 24 if you find something about your wife that's obnoxious you're commanded to divorce her. And as I told you, that could be anything at all from finding somebody prettier than her to having her put too much salt on your dinner. And that's why in Matthew 19:7 when the Jewish people - the scribes and the Pharisees - came to Jesus they said to Him, "Why did Moses command to give a writing of divorcement?" Because, you see, in their minds it was a command because they had misinterpreted Deuteronomy chapter 24. They saw it as a permission to divorce.

For example the Targum of Palestine was written in the first century A.D. It gives us some insight in to how the Jewish people interpreted the Old Testament. And in the Targum of Palestine written in the first century A.D. we find the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24 given by the rabbis was exactly this, they had turned verse 1 into a command. And what is amazing about it is that is exactly the way it is translated in the King James; they've made the same mistake. So that in the King James it says the same thing, - "If you find an uncleanness in your wife give her a bill of divorcement", but that is not what the Hebrew text is saying. But they misinterpreted it and therefore they came up with the fact that divorce is commanded if you find something obnoxious about your wife.

Well, of course, by the time Jesus came around they were shedding their wives rather whimsically. And Jesus knew this was their interpretation and that's why He confronts them with verse 31. The Jews were shedding their wives at random and all the while they're supposing that they were righteous because, after all, Moses said if you find something obnoxious about your wife, get rid of her, give her a paper and send her off on her way just be sure you do the paper work.

Now I believe this is the key to their concept in verse 27. I believe that the whole context here is about adultery. And I want you to get this. Jesus confronts them on this fact, Your standard and your tradition says - Thou shalt not commit adultery, not that's okay it just doesn't go far enough. You pride yourselves that you don't commit adultery I'm telling you, verse 28, you've committed it in your heart when you look on a woman to lust after her. Further He says in verse 31, "When you get a divorce

you're committing adultery," in effect as He'll go on to explain in verse 32. But the point is this, it was so easy for them to get a divorce they didn't need to commit adultery, all they had to do was divorce their wife for any reason whatever, do a little paper work and they could have any kind of relationship they wanted with somebody else. They could shed their wife so fast and marry the one they wanted that they didn't need to do divorcing. So that's what our Lord is after. They're saying, - We don't commit adultery - and He's saying - Yes you do, in your heart and by your divorces on other than divine reasons, other than God-allowed reasons. You whimsically put away your wives and then you say your righteous because you don't commit adultery.

So Jesus confronts them with a proper interpretation to show them that they were really adulterous sinners, they had misinterpreted completely Deuteronomy 24 and the fact that they were not committing adultery was belied by the very fact that they were divorcing their wives without biblical grounds which constitutes adultery. And that's why in verse 32 He said, "But I say unto you that whosoever shall put away or divorce his wife except for the cause of fornication causes her to commit adultery and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced commits adultery." They were saying, -Well, we don't commit adultery. He says, - Number-one, you commit it in your heart and number-two; you're proliferating adultery all over the place by unloading your wives indiscriminately. Every time you turn your wife loose, every time a divorce occurs you force her into adultery which makes you guilty of adultery, whoever marries her is guilty of adultery, whoever marries you is guilty of adultery, you've got adultery all over the place.

Now that's the thrust of the passage. The whole section is to reveal that they are adulterers in spite of what they claim. And Jesus is ripping off the mask of their self-righteousness to reveal their real hearts. And the whole point here is that divorce leads to adultery. It is just sequential; divorce leads to adultery. That's what He is saying. You may claim that you're not adulterers but you're adulterers in your heart and in your divorces which you are doing by misinterpreting the Word of God to fit your own whims.

Now that blatant misinterpretation of Deuteronomy 24 led us to our next point in our study which we got into last week and that is the teaching of the Old Testament. What is the proper teaching of the Old Testament? If the passage in view, Deuteronomy 24, does not teach divorce for any old reason that you want, what does the Old Testament teach? Well, let me remind you very briefly that in the Old Testament God recognized the reality of divorce, there's no question about that, He did. He recognized divorce as a reality. He also recognized a writing of divorcement or a bill of divorcement as a reality. But God never condoned it. God refers to it in Deuteronomy 22 verses 19 and 29 rather indirectly. It is referred to in Leviticus 21 verse 7 and 14. It is referred to in Isaiah chapter 50 verse 1. It is referred to in Jeremiah chapter 3 verse 1. But in all of the references to divorce whether directly or indirectly, God never sanctions it, God never commends it, God never approves of it, God never puts His stamp on it. He only acknowledges that it exists as a concession to sinful people. In fact, as we saw last time in an adulterous situation, God sets forth the example of Hosea and Gomer and

God's own heart in the issue would be that if you have an adulterous situation even that far into your marriage, it's even that severe in your marriage rather than seek a bill of divorcement, seek to do what Hosea did and that is to forgive and redeem the guilty partner. So divorce, God knows, is a socio, political feature of human life designed to regulate the inevitable results of sin.

But the point of Deuteronomy is not divorce for anything obnoxious the point of Deuteronomy is divorce for anything less than adultery causes adultery. What He's saying in Deuteronomy 24 is that if somebody divorces his wife for something like uncleanness or being obnoxious, something short of adultery he forces her to commit adultery, he forces the man who marries her to commit adultery, he forces himself to be guilty of making her an adulterous and anybody that he marries becomes an adulterer. So Deuteronomy, beloved, is saying exactly what Jesus is saying here in verse 32. When you divorce for something other than adultery you simply compound the sin of divorce with sins of adultery all over the place.

And so we saw last time, then, at the conclusion of our discussion that in Gods eyes only adultery granted the technical right to dissolve a marriage, only adultery. And Deuteronomy 24 is saying if you divorce for less than that you're going to defile everybody involved.

Now think with me for a minute. Originally adultery was punishable by what? By death. Now that would certainly dissolve a marriage. Right? Death does away with a marriage. Romans 7 is clear on that so is 1 Cor. 7. Now in cases where death did not take place, somebody committed adultery but death didn't take place such as in the Jews situation at the time of Jesus where they had no power to take life, the Romans had removed that power from them so they couldn't take the life of an adulteress or an adulterer in their time. So it has an alternative, then, and at other points in their history if death didn't take place divorce was an alternative. And we find that, don't we, in Matthew 1:19 in the case of Joseph and Mary. In a time when death would not be the consequence of adultery, Joseph had a choice to put her away privately and essentially that means to divorce her. Now, clearly, the only, only possible biblical grounds for divorce, seen in the Old Testament, is adultery. And the point of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is not to advocate divorce for uncleanness but to show how a man divorced his wife for less than adultery and all he did was defile everybody, when she remarried and by the way the Bible assumes remarriage, it is inevitable.

Now, in a sense, the woman in Deuteronomy 24 is innocent, I mean, what could she do about it? The guy simply divorced her. And he caused her to commit adultery. He really bears the guilt of her adultery. Now here is the way Deuteronomy 24:1-4 should read. Let me read it to you and you just listen. "If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something obnoxious about her and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her away from his house and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house or if he dies then her first husband who divorced her is not allowed to marry her again after

she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land, the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance."

Now the point is simple, then, if you divorce your wife for anything less than adultery you defile her. The reason you could never take her back again is because she is defiled as an adulteress and you're not to marry an adulteress, even though you've made her one, in that sense. So what is the Old Testament saying? It's trying to stop divorce by showing that divorce leads to adultery. Adultery in a marriage, at that point, led to death and when there were times in Israel's history when death didn't occur divorce became an alternative but only at that point. So really the hard line of Deuteronomy 24 is no divorce at all. Since adultery is dealt with by death and anything less is not grounds at all but only leads to further sin and defilement. So the Old Testament, then, recognized that it would happen. Recognized that divorce would occur but it tolerated it only as an alternative to execution, that's all. And, by the way, a better option than divorce would be to forgive and redeem the guilty partner as Hosea indicates.

Now let's look at it this way, this will help you. Are you ready? The permission for divorce, then, became a law. Alright? It was a civil law. The permission for divorce was a law. A law on Israel's statute book designed to meet the practical means of an imperfect, sinful people but the teaching of the book of Genesis, "They two become one flesh permanent" that was not a law that was an ideal, you see. The indissolubility of marriage as originally designed by God was an ideal. Divorce even for adultery was simply a law and the ideal is far higher than the law. For example, earlier in the same passage, you go back to chapter 5, verse 21; the law said you can't kill. In verse 22 the ideal is you don't even hate anybody. The law says you will not commit adultery the ideal is you don't ever lust after anybody. And the same thing is true, the law might allow you to divorce but the ideal is what God laid down way back in Genesis and thus does Jesus say in Matthew 19, "From the beginning it was not so". And when they wanted to ask Him about what should be the case regarding a divorce He simply said, God never intended divorce for what God has joined together let not man what? Put asunder. And by the way, every marriage is a marriage where God joins two people together because God has invented marriage. And so what we have here, then, is there is a law that regulates the external behavior regarding divorce but the ideal is far higher. There was a law in the Old Testament permitting divorce for adultery when execution was not done but the ideal never changed; it was "no divorce."

Now, that's what the Old Testament taught. Now let's come to the third point for tonight, the teaching of Jesus. And I've already told you essentially what it is I just want to expand on it. Jesus teaches the very same thing. Look at verse 32. "But I say unto you that whosoever shall put away his wife", and that's the word for divorce, "except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery, whoever shall marry her that is divorced commits adultery." Jesus is saying the same thing. You divorce for anything less than fornication or adultery and you create adulterers. And so He's saying to the Pharisees, - Don't come along and say, We're righteous, we never commit adultery, you divorce

all over the place and make adultery a trail behind you. Jesus holds them to the ideal. Because, you see, they have decided on the basis of the law, the legal element which they have designed for their own society, they're okay. And so Jesus just sets the legal stuff aside and says, Listen to the ideal and match yourself against that and see how you come out. So Jesus took marriage back to God's ideal. Marriage is totally binding, totally binding.

Now let's look at specifically what Jesus says, verse 32. "But I say unto you whosoever shall divorce his wife", now this is talking about whosoever, anybody it doesn't matter who they are, anybody and everybody who divorces his wife. The word put away is the word apoluo. Now I believe it means divorce. I think that's very clear. It's used repeatedly in this way. Now let me tell you this so you'll understand it. Some people say that the word only refers to a separation. Some people don't want to a -- they don't want to see divorce here at all. Ah, they want to see only a separation. Other people want to see a broken engagement, there's a lot of talk about this referring to the betrothal period and not the real marriage. But the term apoluo means to divorce. It is used that way all throughout the gospel. It is used that way in other places apart from Scripture. That is the most common meaning of the word when it is used in a man - wife context. It means divorce. It isn't just a separation and it isn't just a broken betrothal or a broken engagement. The term in the context, I believe, clearly show that this is the dissolution of a marriage, that divorce is in view. That you have a real marriage here.

As I said, the word apoluo is used in all the gospel passages as the specific term for divorce, Matthew 5:32, Matthew 19: verses 3, 7, 8 and 9, Mark chapter 10 verses 2, 4, 11 and 12 and Luke 16:18. In all of the passages in all those three gospels where divorce is the subject apoluo is the term. And what is interesting to me is that the Jews use it, sometimes it comes out of their lips, and sometimes it comes out of the Lord's lips and there was never a discussion about what it meant, they knew what it meant. They didn't have to discuss whether it meant a separation or a broken engagement or a legitimate divorce or anything, its common meaning was divorce. By the way, twelve different Hebrew, Greek lexicons agree that it means divorce.

Now you can't make this refer to a broken engagement for several reasons. Number-one, when the Jews used the word they didn't have the engagement period in mind. That wasn't what they had in mind. That wasn't their normal use of the word. Further, the background of this passage is what Old Testament passage? Deuteronomy 24. Deuteronomy 24 is the background of this whole text and Deuteronomy 24 is not dealing with broken engagements, it's dealing with divorce. And so to take that engagement concept and impose it upon a passage that's dealing strictly with marriage and divorce on the basis of its Old Testament roots is really to add something that doesn't belong there. Deuteronomy 24 is not concerned with engagement periods. Further, if Christ had in mind the engagement period then He would be adding something to the Old Testament standard rather than commenting on it and reaffirming it. And if that's what He's doing it's the only time He does it throughout this whole section of the Sermon on the Mount, which makes it inconsistent with everything He has in mind. All He's doing in this part of the Sermon on the Mount, He's reiterating to

them what the Old Testament has taught all the while. He is reaffirming God's standard which hasn't changed. He's not adding to. But if this were a section on engagements since Deuteronomy 24 doesn't deal with it we would have to say He was adding something new which wasn't His purpose at all but rather affirming what God's law has always been.

Perhaps the finest resource material on this is available in a series of books known as Kittel. And they show in there that the term is a strong term for divorce and refers definitely to the dissolution of a marriage bond. Introducing the concept of a break up of an engagement is totally foreign to the text, it is totally foreign to the context of Matthew and the debate with the Jews, it is totally foreign to Deuteronomy chapter 24 and it has no relationship to the consequences either. If a person broke an engagement and went on and got married why would they be an adulterer? Why would it be adultery to break an engagement? And go on and marry someone else. No. It's talking about a consummated marriage. No, the idea is clear. Those who say it means only a separation or it means only some kind of broken engagement are people who don't want to allow for any divorce in the Bible at all. Who don't want to allow for any conditions for any divorce at any time so they just remove divorce from the passage but they do injustice to the text. Further, the gospel used the word korizo which means to put asunder and that's what Jesus used when He said, "What God has joined together let no man korizo, put asunder". It means to separate. And clearly whenever it's used in man - woman relationships it means to divorce. So in similar contexts such as in Matthew 19 and in Mark where you have the statement to put asunder in the same context and we know that the word when used of men and women means divorce why would it all of a sudden take on the meaning of an engagement period which is foreign to the context, the Old Testament background and the use of the word which was most normal? No. We're talking about divorce and by the way korizo is used again in I Cor. 7 and it's used at least three times again it means in I Cor. 7 - divorce. There it cannot mean anything to do with some engagement period. It means divorce.

There's another word and that's the word aphleemi which is used in I Cor. 7 three times. It's a very rare word it's translated there leave, 1-e-a-v-e. and what it means when used in the context of man and wife it is a technical term for divorce. So we have these terms; apouo, korizo, aphieemi, they are technical terms for divorce. I'm just trying to make a point here because so many people are confused. You cannot see this as a broken engagement and really do justice to those terms or to the context. All three of these verbs and the context of Matthew 5 and Matthew 19 and I Cor. 7 as we shall see later, indicate that desertion is not the issue, separation is not the issue, broken engagement is not the issue but divorce of a marriage is the issue. Now that's basic.

Let's go back to verse 32. "Now I say unto you whoever divorces his wife causes her", look at that phrase, "to commit adultery." Now that is what the Lord is teaching in this passage. You say you're not adulterers, I'm telling you - you are not only adulterers but you're making other people adulterers. That's what He's saying. By divorcing her. Why? Because remarriage is inevitable and when people have no right for a divorce and they enter into another union they consummate an adulterous

relationship. And really, in a sense, He's saying it isn't even their sin it's yours - you make them commit adultery. You see, He assumes the remarriage, it's inevitable. It's inevitable. And that is the basic teaching.

You find, for example, in Mark chapter 10 and verse 11, the comparative text and let me just show you what it says. Mark 10 verse 11, "And He said unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another commits adultery against her." Now you see what this is? You not only make your wife an adulterer but when you remarry which again is inevitable you become an adulterer. And if a woman puts away her husband and she's married to another she commits adultery. Oh boy, all over the place.

And so it's the same thing. The Lord is saying - Divorce leads to adultery, just in sequence. In Luke 16:18, "Whosoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery and whosoever marries her that is put away or divorced from her husband commits adultery." Now those passages don't even have any exception clauses, they don't even have any, any 'except for the cause of' in there. They just lay it out flat, point-blank that when you get a divorce or you divorce somebody you cause adultery all over the place. Divorce, then, leads everybody into sin. It's precisely what Deuteronomy was saying. Divorce leads to adultery because remarriage is inevitable.

So the sin of adultery has become added to the sin of divorce. And that's what really is the whole sum of the passage. Now look at the end of verse 32, "Whosoever shall marry her that is divorced commits adultery". And that's just adding another dimension, no matter how you cut it, it all comes out the same.

Now look with me for a minute at chapter 19 of Matthew and verse 3. I just want to go through this passage, you'll see what it means and it will just fall open to you and then we'll come back and draw it to a conclusion.

In Matthew 19 and verse 3, "The Pharisees came unto Him and testing Him and saying unto Him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" Now you see that's how they interpreted Deuteronomy 24, that's the way they handled it. They were going to trap Him, see. Oh boy, they thought they had Him cornered. They wanted Him to get on His little soap-box and start blasting away at divorce. You know why? That's how John the Baptist lost his head. And they figured, We'll get Him in the same corner, John the Baptist was thrown into prison, you'll remember, for speaking against the adulterous relationship between Herodias and Herod Antipas and they thought, Boy, let's get Jesus in there to talk about adultery and divorce and then they'll really go after Him when He starts talking against these people who have done that and we'll get Him just like we got John the Baptist.

And so they said, "Tell us, is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause", figuring on the basis of what they knew from Matthew 5 He had spoken earlier, He'd condemn it. "He answered and

said unto them by asking them a question, Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female?" He asked them a question, Don't you know what the Bible teaches? "And He said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and cleave to his wife and they two shall be one flesh, wherefore they are no more two but one flesh; What therefore, God hath joined together let not man put asunder." All He did was quote Genesis 2. He said, Didn't you ever read Genesis 2? And they said to Him, "Well, why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement and to divorce her?" You see, they were still hung up on the fact that they thought Deuteronomy was a command, and "He said unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your heart permitted you to put away your wives but at the beginning it wasn't so." Now even though the Mark passage varies a little in the terms here the thrust is the same. "But I'm saying unto you whosoever shall put away his wife", literally the Greek says, "not on the grounds of fornication and shall marry another commits adultery and whosoever marries her that is divorced commits adultery." Now what the Lord is saying here is that divorce leads to adultery.

Well the disciples got the message, look at verse 10, "His disciples say unto Him, If the case of the man be so with his wife it is not good to marry. I mean, if you're stuck and it's that bad, forget it. If it's that indissoluble - one flesh, never put asunder. If divorce is only a concession to an evil, sinful society, if divorce is only something as a last ditch technicality for fornication and other than that marriage is permanent it's better not to get in it because you might have made a mis-take and then you are stuck. "And He said unto them, well all the men cannot receive this saying except they to whom it's given." That's fine, you can say - it's better not to marry but not everybody can handle being single. There are some eunuchs who were so born from their mothers' wombs and there are some eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heavens sake, "He who is able to receive it, let him receive it". In other words, there are some people for varying reasons who can handle singleness. But not everybody can handle it. And the point that the Lord is making is just know when you go in you're going in on the right terms with a commitment to stay there. Because divorce proliferates adultery.

And, believe me, people, I'm telling you not only from the Bible but I've seen this in experience, I can't unscramble some of the stuff that comes to me. It's like trying to put the egg back together after it's been in the frying pan. You can't do it. People say, - Well, you know, this happened and then that happened and of course this was in the middle and then over here and that - there's no way. The best thing for you is to die, frankly, just die. Go immediately to heaven do not pass go, do not collect \$200. There is no other answer. I mean, you have strangled yourself so far now there's no way out. I tell you - people want to ask questions about - just like the people who came to Jesus and said, - all these people keep marrying and marrying and the seventh husband finally dies and whose wife - it gets to be that way. You know, whenever there's a divorce Jesus says there's going to be adultery. All over the place on the part of everybody involved because remarriage will be inevitable and with no legitimate grounds for divorce to start with a remarriage is adultery - except, and now we go back to Matthew 5.

This is the clause, "except for the cause of fornication". Now listen, that same clause is in Matthew 19:9. And, you know, you hear people - Oh yes, but it's not in Mark and it's not in Luke. That's true. How many times does God have to say something to make it true? People want to argue, - Well it didn't say it in Mark and He didn't say it in Luke. Yeah, but He did say it in Matthew - twice. Listen, every time God talks about divorce He doesn't have to say everything there is to say on the subject. You know what He says in Luke is some things He didn't say in Mark. And what He says in Mark is some of the things He didn't say in Matthew. That's right. Do you know that whether you have the passages on divorce in Matthew 5, Matthew 19, Mark 10 and Luke 16 and every one of them deal with features of divorce and remarriage that the others do not all deal with? In each of those there are some specifics that aren't in the others. Why? Because each writer has a specific plan. The Spirit of God is accomplishing a specific purpose in the context of the passage. Do not force God to say everything on every subject every time He brings it up. You see, the exception clause isn't the major issue. God is not making a great announcement - You can get a divorce for fornication. His announcement is divorce creates adultery except, of course, for the cause of fornication. That's just a sort of concession. It's unreasonable for people to assume that because the Lord didn't say it everywhere He didn't mean it. Listen, if He said it once He meant it. Right? He meant it.

Now some people say, Oh, but look - it's the word fornication. It's the word fornication and you know that's a word that must mean it must mean that they weren't married, so it's got to be a broken engagement because of the word fornication or He would have used the word adultery. But that's not right. The one exception the Lord makes for no divorce is for where there is fornication. And, then, where there's fornication there's technically a cause for divorce. And what He's saying is - Divorce, now get this, leads to adultery unless the divorce was as a result of fornication.

Now fornication is a Greek word pornia from which we get pornography. Pornia means according to the finest of Greek scholarship in seeing what the word means, it means simply this - I'll give you the sum of what it means in just a few words, every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse. That's what it means. Every kind.

Now some say it refers to the engagement period only or they would have used the word for adultery which is moikianot pornia. But that's not so. If the word means every kind of shameful, sinful, sexual intercourse then it will encompass also adultery won't it because that's one kind. And in this context it clearly has in mind adultery because the whole passage is about marriage. This is about marriage. Deuteronomy 24 is about marriage. And the issue is adultery as He talks to these Jewish people.

People say to me - Well then why do they use pornia? Simply because pornia is a bigger word, adultery means a sexual relationship with a person outside your marriage. Pornia means a sexual relationship with anybody, a woman, a man or an animal. It has to do even with bestiality, it has to do with incest, it has to do with sodomy or homosexuality, it has to do with prostitution, harlotry all of

these things before, during after marriage. It is a broad term that encompasses everything. And I believe the reason He uses it is this, because a divorce is not only technically allowable when your partner has a relationship with somebody else but a divorce is technically allowable when your husband has any kind of unlawful sexual relationship or when your wife has any kind of unlawful sexual relationship with a man, a woman, a child or an animal. Because all of those things in the Old Testament brought about the death penalty. They all constitute the sum of a violation.

And by the way, the term fornication is commonly used to encompass the word adultery - you can't split hairs on that word. For example, the Hebrew word for fornication is zanah. It is used according to one lexicon, Davies and Mitchell, of a married woman in committing adultery, in Jeremiah 3:1. In Amos 7:17 zanahis used of a married woman in an adulterous relationship. According to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia fornication, zanah, is to commit adultery or every form of unchastity that could be included. All of the leading sources agree that the Hebrew word zanah which we translate fornication includes adultery. The Greek word pornia is the same. In Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 says W. E. Vine it includes adultery. According to Arndt and Gingrich's lexicon it includes prostitution, unchastity, every kind of unlawful, sexual activity and adultery is included, the unfaithfulness of a married woman. According to Alfred's Greek Testament fornication must be taken to mean sin not only before marriage but after it or during it. Pornia according to Thayer includes adultery. I can just go on and on and on. All of these Greek scholars see it this way.

By the way, Jews in Israel were put to death for acts of fornication both before and after marriage.- The death penalty was opposed upon marriage used for incest, sodomy, bestiality, every forbidden sex act, all you have to do is read the 20th chapter of Leviticus, it's all in there. They were all those things that brought the death penalty and it is that divorce is allowable when death could have ensued. And so you can't just say this means pre-marital sin, it's too broad.

For example, in Numbers 25:1 and 2, the 23,000 of Israel including the chiefs who committed sexual sin with the daughters of Moab were not all unmarried and yet their sin is called fornication. Paul, for example, in I Cor. 10:8 says, "Neither let us commit fornication as some of them committed and in one day fell 3 and 20,000". Now is he only referring to unmarried Israelites? Of course not. And then when he said, "Neither let us commit fornication", is he only referring to unmarried Corinthians? Christ in Revelation 2:14 refers to the same event of the married Jews committing sexual sin with the daughters of Moab and in Revelation 2:14 it's called fornication. In Hosea 2:5 when it talks about Hosea's wife it says she committed -zanah-, fornication. In I Corinthians 5:1 Paul says, "Fornication is common among the Corinthians," and then he gives an illustration within a marriage. So you cannot make the word mean something other than within a marriage it includes that.

Then what does fornication mean? It is the broad word for any kind of unlawful, shameful, sexual activity. That technically should result in death. If death is not incumbent in the situation then divorce is the technical option. Why? Well, certainly because God does not want someone to have to endure

the terrible pain of being the victim of an unfaithful mate. And so God allows the technicality of divorce as a concession to the evil of men. But from the beginning it was not so and it never was His original plan and a better plan would be to forgive and redeem the partner. But there are times when that partner is even forgiven but will not be redeemed. Right? And if you can't do anything about it then that option is there. Jesus never advocates divorce. He only admits there are times when it doesn't lead to adultery, that's all. He hates it all the time. But there are times when it doesn't lead to adultery. There are times when you're the innocent party in a divorce and you've tried every way you can to reconcile, every way you can to redeem and forgive and put it together and it just doesn't happen. And then you're free and if you remarry again it won't be adultery. So the Bible recognizes it will happen. And when it does, those who remarry, which is inevitable, will commit adultery unless sex sin was the cause.

So Jesus sets the record straight. God still hates divorce. His ideal is still monogamous, life-long marriage and divorce only brings adultery apart from the cause of fornication.

A final word, the teaching of Paul, I Corinthians chapter 7 and I'm just going to mention this because we've done a whole study on it in our study of the book of I Corinthians and if any of you would like to get the fullness of it you can get the tapes on I Corinthians 7 and the whole thing is there.

But Paul in the manner of progressive revelation due to the need of the birth of the church in the society in which it lives adds for us a dimension which we must consider, verse 10 1 Corinthians 7. "Unto the married I command, yet not I but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband." Now Paul is saying, I'm telling you people that are married, ha stay together and this isn't mine this is the Lord. In other words, I'm giving you a direct command from the Lord, I got this right from the Lord. This is Matthew 19, this is Luke 16 this is Mark 10, this is Matthew 5. The Lord has told us this, I'm quoting the Lord here. That's what he is saying. I'm quoting the Lord. No divorce. No korizo.

Now that fits what we learned in the gospels doesn't it? He doesn't even bother with any exception clause here. Verse 11, "But if she depart", in other words, if she decides to leave, she has two options, "let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband and let not the husband divorce his wife." If something happens in a marriage and you leave there's no adultery, no adultery, no fornication - you have two options, you can stay single the rest of your life or you can be reunited with your husband. That's the only two options you have. You say, "You mean, if I had a divorce lest than biblical grounds, not on the basis of adultery I either have to go back to him or stay single the rest of my life?" Well, that's what I Corinthians 7:11 says. Now you say, "Well, some of these things happened before I was a Christian." Yeah, I realize that and some of these things we would expect to happen before you're a Christian. Paul's writing to believers. And now that you're a Christian you have to live in the light of 1 Corinthians 7, just like you do in light of the gospel. Verse 12, "To the rest speak I, not the Lord". In other words, now I've gone as far as the Lord went. The Lord simply said, there is no divorce for less than adulterous grounds, that's what He meant. If you just decided to

depart - you either go back or stay single the rest of your life. You can't remarry at all. That would constitute adultery. And he's just reiterating Matthew 5:32, reiterating Deuteronomy 24. There is no divorce apart from fornication which doesn't lead to adultery if you remarry. So he says, You can't do it.

But I want to add something to this, he says, the Lord didn't cover this. It doesn't mean that it's not inspired he means the Lord didn't talk about it. "What if a brother has a wife that doesn't believe?" You become a Christian and your wife hasn't but she wants to dwell with you. Well, then, don't divorce her. If somebody might have said, "You know, I'm a Christian now and I've got an unsaved wife and we're unequally yoked - Bye, honey. I've seen this Christian gal, boy, terrific!" No. No. You stay with her. Verse 13, "And the woman which has a husband that believes not, if he be pleased to dwell with her let her not leave him." If you've got an unsaved partner - stay married. Why? "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband else were your children unclean but now they are holy." In other words, you in that family are going to be a sanctifying influence. The best thing you can do for an unsaved husband and the best thing you can do for the children that are going to come through that marriage is to stay there and be God's representative in the family. Cause I know what would happen if it didn't say that in the Bible people would be married to the unsaved spouse, they come to Christ, they've got an unsaved partner, the first thing they want to do is shed them and get a Christian mate. No. No. That partner is sanctified by your presence. It doesn't mean redeemed it just means the pervasiveness of God's presence is going to be a benefit in their life.

You say, "Well, what if my unbelieving partner wants out?" That's verse 15, "If the unbelieving depart let him depart". Again, the same word *korizo*, a technical name for divorce, if the unbelieving divorces let him divorce. "A brother or a sister is not under bondage," and the word bondage here is the same word used in Romans 7 in speaking of a marriage so it's talking about the breaking of a marriage bond. That means the bond is broken you are no longer bonded to that individual, Just as if he died as in Romans 7, you are free for remarriage. That's how I interpret this. So if an unbeliever departs, seeking a divorce, the unbeliever divorces you are not in bondage in such cases. Why? Because God has called us to peace. God doesn't want you to try to hang on to somebody that hates everything you believe in. That would not be peaceful.

Now Paul knows the perversity of human sin, he does not condone divorce. He simply says in addition to what our Lord says, I who am inspired by the Spirit of God add this dimension, in the newness of the church in the wonder of this new age where people are being called out of all peoples and tribes and nations of the world to form my church I am very aware that there will be times when unbelievers will not want to stay with a believer. They will despise that believer for the faith In Christ and if that is the case, they seek a divorce - let it be the believer is not in bondage. And I believe there is liberty there then for remarriage. Why? Because the unbelieving spouse is gone, in a sense he's as good as dead, no longer sanctified. And I believe at that point there is liberty for remarriage. And so

Paul adds this one dimension to what our Lord said.

Now remember, Paul is not presenting conditions under which divorce is possible because a believer's not to divorce at all. That's the ideal. He's just saying that it may happen that some unbeliever dumps you because he can't stand what you believe in. He's not saying if you've got an unbelieving husband and you see somebody you like better - get everything you can do to get rid of him. Oh no. Now what you've done is you've kept the letter of the law like a Pharisee maybe, you've forced him to divorce you but you've broken the law which is the ideal that God wants in your heart and in God's sight you've sinned. See? You can't get around it. You start playing with the technicalities you're going to come out a Pharisee. And Pharisees are losers because God looks at the heart. God knows if that unbeliever departed after you'd done everything you could to sanctify them, everything you could to win them, everything that you could possibly do to gain an openness in his heart or her heart to Jesus Christ. God knows if it was on those terms or if you just turned your back on him and drove him out. God knows.

So the Scripture is wonderfully consistent, isn't it? The believer is not to divorce at all. He says that. But if a believer is divorced and he is a victim of adultery or a divorce by somebody that doesn't want anything to do with Christ then and only then is he or she free to remarry.

Now listen in closing, we live in the age of grace, beloved, if you're a Christian I want to tell you some good news, everything you've ever done in the past is forgiven. Is that good news? Everything. You may have blown a marriage; you may have blown three marriages. I've met people in our church who have had four in the past. You may have muffed up the whole shooting match time after time after time. I don't know how to unscramble the eggs. I don't know how to put it all together. But I'll tell you one thing I do know and that is that whatever you've done in the past is under the blood of Jesus Christ. Amen? And you start from here. "And if any man be in Christ he is", what? "A new creation, old things have passed away and all things have become new.!" Forget the past, will you? And will you take a hold of the moment and live it according to God's ideal? Let's pray together.

Father, I pray tonight that if there are some in our midst who need to confess some things and repent of some things and get some things straightened out that that would be the case. Father, there may be some right on the crisis point of divorce in their life or contemplating a remarriage - help them to examine clearly the truth that You've given us in Your Word. Lord, for others, that's in the past. Give them a great sense of Your forgiveness. Give them a great sense of how you washed them and make them as white as snows, pure as the driven snow, clean as it were as wool as Isaiah put it. Father, help us to know that all of that is under the blood and yet that doesn't cause us to tread upon Your grace but rather in gratitude to live according to Your ideals. We don't want to be like the Pharisees who just kept the externals, who said - Oh, I wouldn't commit adultery and yet in their hearts they committed it all the time. And in their divorces they continued to commit it and make other people commit it too.

Father, if anyone here has been brought down to the point of deep conviction as the Pharisees must have been if they listened to Jesus, I pray that that conviction will turn to confession and that You'll make it right. Father, I know there are people in this church who are in a situation they probably shouldn't have gotten in to start with but Father, help them to be in that situation content and to make the most of it. We hear the apostle Paul in I Cor. 7 two times saying, whatever state you're in - just stay there, don't try to go backwards and straighten out all the past. Father, help us to make the most of the marriage we have whatever have been the circumstances of the past. And if we're not married but planning, Father, to help us to make the future decisions based upon what we know to be Your Word and Your truth. We know, Father, we can't expect the people who didn't know You, we can't expect that before we knew You we would live by Your standards but we can now. Help us to be faithful.

And, then, Father, beyond all of that I thank You for the marriages in this congregation that have been those exemplary ones where that one man and one woman have been committed to each other since first they said 'I will' and shall be till they see You face to face. I thank You for my own marriage, my own wife, for the wonderful relationship we share. And, Father, I pray that You'll bless the marriages of Grace Church that we might so set an example to the world around us that doesn't know the meaning of a right relationship, of what a marriage can be. That people will be drawn to Jesus Christ and to eternal life simply through the testimony of our union in Him. We thank You for our time together in Christ's name. Amen

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).