

Jesus' Teaching on Divorce, Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 19:1-6

Code: 2337

Let's look together at the Word of God, Matthew chapter 19, Matthew chapter 19. In the first 12 verses of this chapter, we have the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ on the subject of divorce. It is a very, very essential area of Scripture, and so we're unhurried as we examine it. We began last week, and we'll look at it this week, and again next week, as well. As we begin this examination of Matthew 19 for the second week, I want to reaffirm something to you just to get our perspective a little bit.

As I was ministering this week in the Capital Bible Seminary back in Washington, D.C., several of the students and faculty members said to me, "John, we appreciate the fact that you emphasize the authority, the truthfulness of the Word of God. We sense that as the emphasis of your life in ministry." And I said, "Well, then you're picking up the right signal, because that's exactly the way I feel." They went on to tell me that their goal and objective in working with their students and carrying on the ministry God has given to them is that they should bring their students to the same kind of commitment to the authority of God's Holy Word.

And there are young men and pastors alike who ask me very often the question, what do you feel as a pastor is your primary role? What is it that you're trying to accomplish with your people? And I will generally say this to them. I believe that the primary objective that I have with the people, at least the target that I'm shooting for, the ultimate goal, of course, is to glorify God. But the immediate objective that I have is to bring people to a point in their conscious mind where they are submissive to the Word of God, in general. In other words, where they believe that the Bible is the infallible, authoritative, inerrant, holy Word of God.

And when the Bible speaks, it is the end of the argument. It speaks authoritatively, and we are to respond to it, and obey it. If I as a pastor can just get people to make a general commitment to the authority of the Word of God, then you can introduce any principle out of the Word of God, and they are bound by that heart commitment to abide by it.

Very often people ask the question, well, you know, when you preach on divorce, or when you teach on this subject, or that that's controversial, do you get a lot of negative reaction from your people? Do they kind of fight against what you're teaching?

And I've been able to say to people through the years, "No. That is not what happens. In fact, we have seen that when we teach the Word of God, and open its pages, and teach its truths, that people

willingly submit to it because they have an overall submission to the authority of the Word of God, in general.” And that’s important for us to articulate that, because when you come to the subject of divorce, you’ve got to remember that God is speaking just as authoritatively as he ever spoke at any other time.

That has been somewhat undermined because we have been hearing so many, many different views about the subject. As I said before, an unholy church membership tends to want more and more concessions. And a very convenient thing happens in many churches. They just eliminate the Bible, or they just reinterpret it, or say, “Well, that part was a cultural issue and we can’t hold to that anymore,” or, “It isn’t that serious.”

And so to begin with, I just want to affirm to you where we always stand here at Grace Church, and that is when God speaks we listen, and there’s really no debate with that. We are called to submit to the authority of the Word of God, and when the Word of God speaks, we willingly, and anxiously, and lovingly, and eagerly, and happily, and joyfully submit to the authority of that Word knowing that in obedience there is great blessedness.

So as we open the pages of our Bibles again, look at Matthew 19, and I’m reminded not only from this text, but many others that we’ll be examining on the same subject, and we’re remind what God teaches about divorce. The only response is a right response. And that is one of submission to God’s Word.

Jesus said it this way. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” It is our food. We live by every word that comes out of God’s mouth, and God’s mouth has given forth some very essential words on the subject of divorce. The fact today that divorce is an epidemic that it is all around us, that we are all touched by it, that we are all threatened by its devastating impact does not change one wit God’s Holy Word. The sooner God’s people begin to obey His Word the sooner they’re going to experience the fullness of His blessing.

So I just want you to know that it has to work in the subject of divorce, as difficult as it may seem, just as it works in the subject of salvation or any other thing. People, you know, eagerly run under the truth of redemption, and run under the truth of forgiveness, and want to run out from under the truth about divorce and holy living. But we cannot so dichotomize the revelation of God. Now, in order to our eyes again fixed on what our Lord teaches, let me read you Matthew 19:3-9.

“The Pharisees also came unto Him, testing Him, and saying unto Him, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for every cause? And He answered and said unto them, Have you not read, that he who made *them* at the beginning made them a male and a female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall 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

divorce. They say unto Him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to divorce her? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts permitted you to divorce your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall divorce his wife, not on the grounds of fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her who is divorced doth commit adultery.”

Now that’s the clear teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ on the subject. It’s not very mystifying. It’s not hidden. It’s just very clear. And last time we noted that Lord, in teaching on divorce here and confronting the Pharisees, is beginning a new dimension of His life ministry. At the end of chapter 18, He concludes a wonderful lesson on the childlikeness of the believer. Then 19:1 says, “When he finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee.” That is the end of the Galilean ministry.

Several years He’d been ministering in Galilee and now it’s over. And He starts on his journey to his passion in Jerusalem, to His death and resurrection. In so doing, He goes across the Jordan into the borders of Judaea, or the region Judaea beyond the Jordan. We said that the beyond area was called Perea, from the word *peran* which means “beyond.”

So we have then in chapter 19 and 20 his Perea ministry. He ministered in the Galilean area, now in the Perea area. It’s another area where there were many Jewish people who needed to know that he was the Messiah. And so He went there. Great multitudes followed Him, verse 2. He healed them there, and Mark in chapter 10 adds that he also taught them, and certainly taught them things concerning the kingdom and concerning Himself as the Savior.

So we come to this new dimension, and as he is progressing into that Perea ministry, he is confronted in verse 3 by his archenemies, who forever were on the aggressive to discredit and destroy Him, the Pharisees. So verse 3 begins with the attack, and we went into that last time.

Now you remember they come to Him and they test Him. They’re not coming with an honest question. They’re not true seekers. They don’t really want answers. All they want to do is make it difficult for the Savior. They come and they test Him, and they have two things in mind.

They say to him, “Is it lawful for you to divorce your wife for every cause?” That is the popular view. That is the view held by the popular rabbi, and everybody sort of liked that view, because it led you shed your wife whenever you want. So they’re waiting for Jesus to take the opposite view, and thus become instantly unpopular. The crowd will disseminate, they hope, and He’ll be discredited as one who holds too narrow a line. So they’re seeking to discredit Him, but more than that they’re seeking to destroy Him.

Perea was a territory ruled by Herod Antipas, who had an illegitimate marriage. He had married not only his brother’s wife, but his brother’s wife who was near relative, so it was not only adultery and

wife stealing, it was incest. John the Baptist had confronted their union and got his head chopped off for it. They were hoping they could get Jesus to take a strong stand against divorce, and therefore lose His head, too. So they came with the idea of testing Him, hoping He'd fail the test, lose His popularity, and even lose His head. They wanted to be rid of Him.

So they asked a question, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for every cause?" They know that Jesus' earlier taught, which is recorded in Matthew 5 and Luke 16 that it is not lawful. And they know He won't take the popular view, and they hope that'll be enough to end His popularity with the folks that are collecting around Him.

Now Jesus doesn't evade the issue. He answers them. And we went into verses 4-6 last time and saw the answer, the answer that follows their attack. He did not bypass the question. He did not avoid the issue. He went right at their question.

Some years ago, when I was first getting involved sometimes talking to the media on television and radio, I was advised to pay no attention to what they ask. They say that in the media, whether you're in politics or whatever, when you're interviewed people learn not to necessarily say anything in relation to the question. Disregard whatever they ask you, and talk about whatever you want to talk about. And later on the reporter will put in the question to fit your answer. And that really works that way. They'll shoot the camera at you and you'll answer a bunch of questions. They'll turn the camera around off of your shoulders, shoot it back at them, and they'll ask questions that fit your answers.

So kind of the idea is you just give your line and say what you want to say. Don't get caught having to answer a question you don't want to answer in public. Just say whatever you want to say and they'll fit questions to your answers, so they don't look silly. And that's what they do. That's what they do in many cases. Now it doesn't always work too well in live interviews on television, but when you have a taped interview that's pretty standard.

But Jesus doesn't do that. He doesn't evade anything. They ask a question, He gives them a direct answer. But His omniscient mind, of course, grasps an answer that is going to make sure that He comes out ahead and not them. And so instead of putting Himself on the line, He just goes back to Genesis, and the answer He gives them is to recite the standard laid down by the eternal God, which would be very difficult for the people to take issue with, and Herod, as well.

So He lets God speak, and He starts out by saying in verse 4, "Have you not read?" So His authority is not His own opinion, it's not His own idea, it is the revelation of God. He reverts back to the Word of God, quotes out of Genesis, and gives four reasons why it is not lawful to divorce.

Four reasons. Reason number one, verse 4, "Have you not read, he who made *them* at the beginning made them a male and a female?" And that's the first reason not to divorce. When God created the

ideal situation it was one male, one female, and no spares. That's it. Just one male, one female, and there weren't any alternatives, and there weren't any options. That's the way God designed it.

Secondly, divorce is not in God's plan, not only because of the one man, one woman creation; but because of the strong bond. Verse 5, the word "cleave," glue. God intended two people to be glued together.

Thirdly, because of the one flesh; you have two becoming one in verse 5, then verse 6 says, they are therefore no more two, and you can't divide one. So one man, one woman; strong bond, one flesh. Then the fourth reason why no divorce is in verse 6 in the midway point. "What therefore God had joined together, let not man divorce." Marriage is a work of God, and we went into that in strong detail last time.

So when confronted with the question is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause, Jesus said, "Don't you know that God said - " and you can't get a higher court than that " - God said one man, one woman; strong bond, strong flesh; marriage is my divine work, don't divorce. Don't divorce."

Now they just really find it difficult to argue against that. That's the word of the living God in Genesis 1:2. Now Jesus stops with that. But this morning I want to take a little interlude between verses 6 and 7, and I want to go back into the Old Testament a little bit to show you how this is consistently carried out in the Old Testament.

When God laid down the idea of one man, one woman for life; strong bond, one flesh, work of God, no divorce. When God laid that down, he really affirmed it. Let me tell you some of the ways that he affirmed it.

In the ten commandments, which is the crystallization of God's law for man's life, He said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." In other words, "adultery" is a word that has to do with sexual relationship outside of a marriage union by married people. When a married person has a relationship with someone other than their partner, that is adultery and "thou shalt not commit adultery." In other words never, never violate marriage. Never violate marriage. That is one of the very most key laws God ever established. In case you do, Leviticus 20:10 says if anyone commits adultery, he shall surely be put to death.

Now the only thing that can break a marriage, then, the sin that breaks a marriage is adultery according to God's priority law, because it results in what? Death. Where you have death, you have the end of a marriage. There's little question about that. And so God says one man, one woman; strong bond, one flesh, work of God, no divorce. And if you commit adultery, you'll lose your life. So there really was no provision for divorce, only for execution, which would free the person, of course, to marry again if they were an innocent partner.

The point is this. Any sexual sin is serious. The violation of a marriage is fatal, very serious. That gives us God's view of the sanctity of one man, one woman; strong bond, one flesh, work of God, no divorce. He really means what he says, a very strong word.

Let me take it a step further. In the ten commandments, the ten commandments wrap up with this statement. "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's - " and then it list a lot of things including his what? His " - wife."

So God is saying not only are you not to commit adultery, you are not even to want to commit adultery. It is not only that you're not to do it, it's that you're not even to think about it. Jesus reinforced this in Matthew 5:28, when he said if a man looks on a woman to lust after her, he has committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Listen, marriage is so sacred, so sacrosanct, so much a separation of two people unto each other, so much a work of God that any violation of it in body or in mind is to violate the command of God. The priority law of God was that when a person violates that in body, they are to be executed on the spot. That's how sacred marriage is.

Now, that is the way God designed it from the very beginning. That's God ideal, perfect plan. But it seems awfully hard for people to live up to that, doesn't it? And marriages seem to be just nothing but a battleground, just a place where war rages all the time. People seem to be on the verge of splitting up, and whether they're in the church or out of the church, it seems to be a fairly common problem among those who call themselves Christians.

I want to take you back so that you'll have an understanding of that to the book of Genesis, and some things that we talked about some years ago that I want to reinforce in your mind. Why do we have such a difficult time maintaining God's ideal? Why is it so hard for people to make a meaningful, one man, one woman; strong bond, one flesh kind of relationship? Why is that so hard? Let me show you why.

When God created, Genesis 1:28, he created it says in 27, "male and female," a man and a woman. "God blessed them, said unto them, Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it and have dominion." Let's stop there. When God made man and woman, he made them as a perfect complement. Now we know he made man as the head. Genesis tells us man was created first. And the woman was made to be his helper it says in Genesis 2:18. "It wasn't good for man to be alone," he needed to have a helper.

So woman was created to come alongside to help, to support. Man was to be the strong one, the provider, the leader, the protector. This is affirmed for us in 1 Corinthians 11:3-9, where the Word of

God very clearly lays out the fact that the man is the head of the woman, even as God is the head of Christ, and Christ is the head of His church. It is also affirmed for us very strongly in 1 Timothy 2:11-14, where it says that the man is the head of the woman as indicated by the creation of God. That's the way it was in the beginning.

But you really don't see that headship as you look at Genesis 1:28. "God blessed them. God said to them, Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it: and have dominion." In other words, there was a co-regency. There was such an incredibly perfect harmony, there was such a bliss of union between man and woman that there was no conflict, no friction, man being fully man in every dimension in terms of strength, and protector, and provider, and all of that. Woman being source of strength and help as God designed her to be, in such beautiful and perfect God-created harmony that it could be said they ruled together.

There was a majesty about that relationship. Headship, the man; submission, the woman; but blended so perfectly in oneness that it could be said that they multiplied together, they filled the earth together, they subdued the earth together, and they ruled the earth together. No discord, none at all.

Look at chapter 3. Then came sin, and when sin came, that was lost. Because the woman, in sinning, took over the leadership. When she was being beguiled by the serpent, she didn't go back and say, "Adam, I need your protection. I need the strength that you're to bring to me. I need your headship. I come under that protection." She didn't do that. She just acted independent of him. She heard the word, "You can know good and evil, and you can be like God," and she usurped the place of leadership.

Then Adam fell to the place of the follower, and because she did it, "he who was not beguiled," says Paul, "did it, as well." So in the fall, there was a reversal of the God-ordained roles. The woman took the lead and the man followed. And you know what happened. Sin entered the world.

It came because there was not only an actual act of disobedience toward God, but precipitating that act and following that act, a reversal of the God ordained role for the man and the woman. And then God cursed them. And I want you to look at the curse in Genesis 3:16. You can't look at all of it because of time. Part of it was, of course, in verse 17 and 18 and 19, where man would have to work to get things out of the ground, and where before they were growing there naturally by the power of God, and so there would be sweat, and toil, and so forth, and there would be death, and all that.

But I want you to look at 3:16, because here is a curse upon marriage. Here is a curse upon the relationship. There was a curse, first of all, in verse 16 on child bearing. In other words, women would suffer great pain in bringing forth children. And then from 17 on, men would suffer great pain in bringing forth resource out of the earth.

So woman is cursed over here in her child bearing, man is cursed over here in his bread winning, if you will. But they're cursed together in terms of their relationship at end of verse 16. Look what it says. "And thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."

Now that's a very important statement. "Your desire shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over you." People have been confused about what that means, and most commentators say that your desire simply refers to the normal strong, sexual desire, and attraction and need that a woman has for a husband, and that the husband ruling over her is a normal function of headship, the husband leads his wife. But if that's the normal thing, and that's the way it ought to be, and that's just routine stuff, then what does it have to do with being cursed? I'll tell you another thing. That's not what happens in marriages.

Marriages are places where the woman wonderfully continues to desire her husband and to be strongly and physically attracted to him while he takes care of all of her needs and ruling and supplying and providing. It isn't that way. And certainly that's not a curse, either. So we have to look a little more closely at the text to find out what it's saying. It must be something to do with the fall, because it's all about a curse here.

And the key to it is to understand both phrases. Look at the last one, "he shall rule over thee." The word for rule there in Hebrew is *mashal*, and its counterpart in the Greek language used in the Old Testament version called the Septuagint is the word *kathistmi* and it means "to install in an office, to install in an office," or "to elevate to an official position." It would be like putting a political person in office, or someone in a corporation in office, or in the service, in the Army, Navy, or Air Force, or whatever. Putting someone in an office, installing them in a place of hierarchical authority, and that's the word.

What it's saying is there, since the fall man is installed in an official position as ruler. Where before the fall, you have a sort of a co-regency, a wonderful blending harmony. The curse is, "Woman, you stepped out from under your husband. You acted independently. So from now on, the husband is installed as the ruler in your relationship. And you're going to have to suffer under his headship."

That's the essence of the curse. A new kind of ruling, not the wonderful harmony of the one they known before as co-regents together subduing the earth, but a new one, and man's authority becomes perverse and despotic. And you ask, "Are there male chauvinists?" Of course, millions of them. And we don't argue with people from the women's movement who want to remind us of male chauvinism. It is worldwide. It is history long. It is since the fall men have been installed in a despotic place and they have tried to keep women down.

In all societies of the world with few exceptions through all the history of the world have been male-denominated societies, and in many, many, many cases, it is abusive kind of domination. We don't deny that for a moment. That's part of the curse, men pushing women around. Even in the time of our Lord Jesus Christ, women were looked upon as something less, even in some cases, than animals. And throughout societies of our contemporary modern world, it is difficult for women to get any kind of understanding because men tend to want to push them down in an unbalanced and improper way, but that's part of the curse.

Marriage was cursed. When the roles were reversed in the sin, and Eve took the lead, and Adam took the following role, God said, "I'm going to curse you because you came out from under him by putting him over you, installing him in an office." And because man is sinful, he tends to rather brutally carry off that office.

Then the second element it says in verse 16, "Thy desires - " speaking of the woman. "He said unto the woman, 'Thy desire shall be to thy husband.'" This isn't a normal desire. This isn't a sexual desire. In fact, the husband usually has a stronger sexual desire than the wife. That's not talking about that. The Arabic root for that word means "to seek control."

So the curse is this. The man is installed as the ruler, but the woman is going to seek to control him. And so you have in sin and the curse the battle of the sexes, and the reason there is conflict in marriage is because from then on, woman is still trying to get out from under and run the deal, and man is trying to keep her down there where she is, so you have not only male chauvinism, but you have women's rebellions, and they run through all of history, all of history.

A good way to understand the phrase is to go over to 4:7, because the identical phrase and the same words with the same grammatical construction appears there. This is what it's about. Cain, of course, and he is being warned. And the Lord warns him, and just the middle of verse 7, "Sin lies at the door." He's warned about sin. Sin is personified. "And unto thee *shall be* sin's desire, and thou shalt rule over him."

It's the identical phrase. The only other time it's ever used in the Pentateuch, the only time the word's used in this identical phrase is only used here. And what it's saying there is, "Cain sin desires you - " in the sense that sin wants to control you " - but you must rule it." It is the same phrase as 3:16. The woman desires to control you, but you must rule her.

So the marriage of Adam and Eve was cursed in the moment of their sin, when they reversed their God ordained roles, and since that time there has been conflict and tension in marriage as the woman seeks supremacy and the man seeks suppression. That's the curse, and that's why we have divorce.

Conflict became inevitable. But because there is conflict doesn't mean God changes His view. Let's go all the way to the end of the Old Testament, the book of Malachi, and let's see after all the flood of history from Adam on, if God feels any differently.

In Malachi 2, God is indicting the people of Israel, and he's indicting them because they are unfaithful to their wives. He says in verse 14, "The Lord has been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet *is* she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant."

Would you notice something in verse 14 that fascinates me? "The Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth." That's just what our Lord said in Matthew 19, that marriage is God putting people together. The Lord is the witness to a marriage. The Lord is the one there confirming the covenant in marriage.

And now you are "dealing treacherously with the wife who *is* your companion and the wife of your covenant." And then in verse 16, God recites his view, "For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith he hates divorce." Well, we would expect that, wouldn't we? I mean, if we know anything about Genesis, we would know that he wanted marriage one woman, one man; strong bond, one flesh, work of God, no divorce. Just because the curse came, the marriage was cursed, doesn't mean God change his view. The battle is on, but God's standard never changed. He hates divorce.

And he goes on to make a very interesting statement, "For *one* covers violence with his garment." What that's saying in the Hebrew is that when you get a divorce, you splatter your clothes with violence. You know, when a person got into a battle, and it would be a hand-to-hand combat, and there would be life and death struggle, and you would get blood-spattered garments. And this is what he's saying here. When you divorce, you splatter your garments with evil. You platter your garments with sin. God hates divorce.

Malachi 3:6. What does it say? "I *am* the Lord, - " what? " - I change not." I change not. You say, "Well, what if the conflict gets so great? What if you're really being defrauded in your marriage?" Let me take you back to the book of Hosea, the first of the minor prophets, follows the book of Daniel. I don't know if you remember the story of Hosea. We went over it in our family series. But I want to remind you of it, Hosea.

You can't help but love this guy. I will be fascinated to meet him in heaven. And the Lord speaks to him in 1:2, and he says, "Go, take a wife," which doesn't sound too bad. But, "Go, take a wife, and she's going to turn out to be a harlot, and you're going to wind up with a bunch of illegitimate children." Verse 3, "So he went, took Gomer - " it seems like a ridiculous name for a wife, but he took her " - daughter of Diblaim; and they had a baby," Jezreel, because God "was going to bring

vengeance on Israel” for Israel’s harlotries.

Hosea was to marry a woman who turned out to be a prostitute, produce illegitimate children, and he was to be a living illustration of God and Israel. God married Israel. Israel turned out to be a harlot, had all kinds of illegitimate affairs, and relationships, and produced all kinds of illegitimate results.

And so Hosea and Gomer become a living parable of God and Israel. Well, they were married, and Jezreel was first, and then came their second child, a daughter, verse 6. “She conceived again, and bore a daughter. And *God* said unto him, Call her name Loruhamah - ” which means “no mercy.” No mercy. Verse 8, “and when she had weaned Loruhamah, she conceived, and bore a son. And *God* said, Call his name Loammi - ” which means “you’re not mine.”

How’s that for two kids, No Mercy and Not Mine? I’ll show no mercy to that kid, and that one doesn’t belong to me. Illegitimate, both of them. This woman brought home these two illegitimate kids. How does he react? Well, he loves her. Hard to believe. More than that, he is devoted to her because of the covenant. He is an honorable man. He wants to make the most out of his union, even though he’s married to a prostitute. He’s married an adulteress who keeps having illegitimate children with very strange names that point out to the whole wide world they’re not his kids. I’d like you to meet my son, Not Mine.

What is his reaction? Well, he’s going to be like anybody else. First of all, he’s going to be mad. And there will be anger in his heart, and you see in 2:2. “Contend with your mother,” he tries to gang up the whole family on her. “She is not my wife, and I am not her husband.” I’m not taking this. This isn’t my wife and I’m not her husband. I’m getting out of this deal.

“Let her therefore put away her harlotry out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst.” Boy, I’m going to lay it on that woman. I mean, this is just – this is fury coming out of him. “Wait until you see what I do to this woman.” It’s a very normal reaction, and he’s filled with anger.

And “I’ll not have mercy on her children for they *are* the children of harlotry. For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give *me* my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink.”

She was in it for one reason folks, money. She was a prostitute. She was a street walker. She was a paid harlot. That’s what she was. That was it for her. She had literally devastated this man Hosea, who was a prophet of God. She had turned these two illegitimate children into a home that was so utterly chaotic, they would have had to bear stigma all their life that is hard to imagine by their very name, let alone her reputation. And he’s mad, and having a prostitute for a wife. Some Christian

counselor, no doubt, would get a hold to this deal and say you should have been out of this long ago, Hosea.

Then he shifts gears in verse 6, “Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall that she shall not find her paths.” He gets over his anger and he wants to keep her from doing it anymore. “I’m not going to let her do this anymore.” He gets sort of righteous, you know, “I’m going to be her protector. I’m going to get a hedge around her and a wall, and she’s not going to be able to find her paths.”

And then in verse 7, “And she shall follow after her lovers, but she’ll not overtake them; and she’ll seek them, but she shall not find *them*.” I’m just going to make it really hard for her so she can’t connect up.

I’ve seen this happen in situations like this, where a guy’s wife is doing this, and he goes out there and tries to close off all her alternatives, gets phone numbers of the people she’s meeting, or the men she’s sleeping with, and calls them up and threatens them, camps on their doorstep, writes them letters. I’ve known them to write letters to their employers saying, “You have a guy in your business who’s having relationships with my wife, breaking up my home,” et cetera, et cetera. “Is this the kind of a place you operate?” In other words, just take whatever it takes to close out all the options.

When they ask me if they should do that, I say, “Why not? Go for it.” That’s what he did, tried to close it all out. And he says in the end of verse 7, Then, see. “She’ll say, I’ll go and return to my first husband; for then was *it* better than now.” I mean if you can’t make any money out there, and you can’t make any contacts, and you’re going to say, “I’ll go back to him because this is the only option I’ve got.”

And somebody might say, “I don’t want her on those terms,” but not him. He wanted her on any terms. Quite a forgiving guy, isn’t he? Then she’ll say, “I better go back. I haven’t got any options.” He says, “I’ll take her even on those conditions, because it’s right.” It’s right.

Then we even go deeper into his heart in verse 8. “For she did not know that I gave her grain, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, *which* they prepared for Baal.” What he’s saying there is she doesn’t know it. I made sure she had clothes to wear. I made sure she had food to eat. I made sure she had money to live with. I took care of her.

Here’s this guy who loves her. She’s out there walking the streets, having affairs all day and night, and he’s out there making sure she’s got enough to eat and a place to stay, and the money she needs. And I don’t know what method he used, but somehow he funneled the sources through to her so she made sure she had what she needed. You say, “This guy’s too much.”

Verse 9. "I'll return, and take away my grain in its time, and my wine in its season, and recover my wool and my flax *given* to cover her nakedness. And I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of my hand. And I will also cause all her mirth to cease." Now the more he thinks about what he's been paying for her, the madder he gets, and now he's reverting back to where he started.

He says, "I've been given this all to her and supplying, I'm going to take away her party. I'm going to end it all. Her new moons and all her - " and here, you see the transition here all the time. You don't know whether he's talking about the wife or Israel. It's the picture of God and his relationship to his people, Israel.

Then he shifts gears again in verse 14, and it's so beautiful. And this is God with Israel just as much as its Hosea with Gomer. "I will allure her, bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly unto her." He's going to do that. Go back and try to court her again. Can you believe that? He's going to go find that ugly prostitute with all of her horrible lifestyle and her affairs, and he's going to really lay it on, you know. Take her flowers, court her, whisper sweet nothings in her ear, treat her as if she was a virgin. It's incredible.

You know where she ends up? She ends up on a slave block being sold. She ends up as a prostitute for sale on a block, stark naked. They're auctioning her off. He shows up in 3:2. "So I bought her." "I bought her," he says. She's a costly lady. "I bought her for myself for 15 *pieces* of silver and a homer of barley and a half a homer of barley." Highest bidder.

Frankly, I think you got a lousy deal humanly speaking, don't you? I mean, who needs it? But he bought her. "And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide with me many days." Do you know what's nice about that? He's not saying, "Now, look, baby. I got a lot invested in you. One more false move, that is it." That's not his approach. See, his approach is, "I covenant that you will be with me for - " what? It's unconditional, isn't it? It's unconditional " - many days; and you will not play the harlot, and you will not be for another man: so *will* I also be for thee." You may have fouled up, but I'm for you still, and I'll always be for you. And you can't kill that commitment in me. You can't kill that covenant in me. so beautiful.

The reason we have so much difficulty with this is because we have so little of the understanding of the heart of God and forgiveness, don't we? It's kind of like that parable we learned about in Matthew 18 where the man was so willing to be forgiven the 10,000 talent debt, but couldn't forgive his friend the \$18.00 he owed him. We take it all from God, but we have such a difficult time giving it to someone else.

So, he bought her back and took her as a virgin, made an unconditional covenant, and said, "I'll be for you." Now that is only to reinforce in your mind that God's standard hasn't changed, right? Hasn't changed. Now keep this in mind. File this somewhere. The only thing up to this point in our discussion that could break a marriage was one sin. What was the sin? Adultery. Because it brought what? Death. Very important.

I want to draw this particular study to a conclusion - and we'll jump into the rest next week - by drawing you to Ephesians 5, Ephesians 5:22. You know this beautiful, beautiful text, but let me show you something. It's so wonderful. This text is so pure, it is so blissful, it so wondrous that it seems absolutely impossible and incongruous with everything we know about marriage. It starts out, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord."

Now does that seem hard? I mean you say, "You know, I can submit to the guy now and then, but as unto the Lord? I mean that is hard. I mean, I know the guy, and there are a lot of things that were true about the Lord that are just not true about him. He's a Christian, but the Lord?"

You see, it almost seems far beyond any conception of reality. But do you know what it is? It's a reaffirmation of the original creation principle. When in Adam's perfection, he was the vice regent of God on the earth, you see. It wonderfully reaffirms the original intention that a wife would be gently, lovingly, meekly, yet strongly submissive to her own husband, and recognize - verse 23 - the headship.

And she would be subject, in verse 24, "in everything." Back to that wonderful helper role, where in her position as a submissive helper and his as a leading head, they combine to co-reign on the earth, and none is diminished, but both are exalted.

And then "husbands - " verse 25 " - love your wives." Now in the curse – watch - in the curse, the woman seeks to what? Control, and the man seeks to dominate. But here, the woman wants to submit and the man doesn't seek to rule. He just wants to do what? "Husbands - " what? " - love your wives." Purify them, nourish them - verse 29 - cherish them. You're the protector, provider, nourisher, lover, supporter, provider, protector, all those things.

So the point of the text here is that you have in Ephesians 5 a return to the Genesis 1 and 2, design of marriage. Say, "Is it possible?" It has to be. And the key is in 5:18 of Ephesians. Paul says, "Be not drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be - " what? " - filled with the Spirit." Now I believe that when Christ comes into a marriage, and two people love the lord Jesus Christ, if those two people walk in the Spirit - that is their lives are controlled by the Holy Spirit - that they will - verse 21 - "submit one to another in reverence for God."

And folks, at that juncture, we are right back to where I started this morning. The reason we keep a marriage together is because God says that's His priority, and what we want to do is to submit to the authority of the Word of God, right? And we're right back there. As we walk in the Spirit, we have wonderful submission to one another because we reverence God. And wives in the power of the Spirit can return to that pre-fall bliss of being wonderfully submissive to their husbands. And husbands can return to that pre-fall bliss in a sense of being loving, caring, nourishing, cherishing toward their wife. And where sin comes in, there will be forgiveness, as God forgave Israel and Christ the church.

Let me give you just a little key hint, two words to remember to make your marriage what it ought to be. And they're the key to it. First word is self-denial, self-denial. It's a hyphenated word, but it's a word that we need to understand, self-denial. As long as you go into your marriage demanding your rights, defending yourself, justifying yourself, getting what you want, seeking your own fulfillment, following your own desires, acquiescing to the temptations of the flesh, you'll devastate a union. But when you deny yourself, when you deny yourself, say "no" to self, you're on the right road.

And the other word along with self-denial you need to keep in mind, and it's the same word really, is unselfishness. It means that I think more of you than I do of me. I say "no" to me, I say "yes" to you. That's the two sides. I don't have to justify myself. I may be falsely accused. That's alright. I'm not vengeful. I'm not vindictive. I'm not defensive. I say "no" to myself and those things that would drag me away from the covenant that I have made, those that would lure me away from the love bond we share. I say "no" to those things and I say "yes" to you, and "yes" to you, and "yes" to you.

That doesn't mean that I acquiesce to your stupidity or your sin, but it is to your need, and to your welfare, and to your best interest that I give myself. I abandon myself. And when sin comes up in the self-abandoning and the self-denial heart, it can be resolved just as it was in Hosea's heart.

Let me close with a verse. Somewhere in the front of your Bible I think you might want to write this verse down because it reflects your attitude toward the whole of Scripture including what we said this morning. It is Isaiah 45:9. Listen to it. And I'm going to give it to you just as the text says. This is its intent. Listen.

"Woe unto him that argues with his Maker!" Did you get it? "Woe unto him that argues with his maker!" It's pretty stupid, isn't it? What it says is this. When God says something, you better do it, right? Whatever it's all about. If it's about marriage, or divorce, or anything. If God says it, you do it. And woe unto you if you argue with him. The word "woe" means "damn, curse," cursed be the person who argues with his maker.

It's pretty stupid to begin with. If God made you, he knows how to make you work best, right? If he's the manufacturer, he's got the manual on your operation. And so we come right back to where we

started. Listen. The job of the pastor and the role of the church is to bring you under submission to the authority of this Word. And we've done that, and we've told you what God feels about divorce. We've laid out God's perspective on divorce. And the only thing we can say in response is "cursed" or "woe" be unto the person who fights or argues with his maker.

Can I just add a footnote? God seeks your good. Did you know that? He seeks your blessedness. You will be blessed in obedience to His Holy Word. So that's what Jesus told the Pharisees. I mean, that's the essence of it. Just reaffirm God's law. Then they said this to him. "Why then did Moses command us with a writing of divorcement to divorce our wives?" I mean, if that's God's law, why did Moses command the divorce? It's a good question, isn't it? And next week we're going to answer it. So you be here. Let's pray.

Father, we want nothing less than your perfect will, your perfect plan. Bless the marriages in this church. Bless the young couples anticipating marriage, the young people who haven't even found a partner, Father, help them find the right one. In a pure relationship, in a genuine commitment of love and trust, to build a marriage that will glorify your name.

Thank you for your clear Word. It isn't hard to understand. We know how you feel. And we know how really stupid it is to fight with the One who is our maker. So we don't fight. We willingly submit to your Word and to the blessedness that obedience to it brings. Bless every heart today and we thank you in Christ's name, amen.

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