

The Truth About Divorce, Part 2

Scripture: Mark 10:1-12

Code: 41-49

Let's open our Bibles to the tenth chapter of Mark's gospel, that is the very Mark called John Mark we read about in Acts chapter 12, who wrote this glorious gospel and learned perhaps most of the personal incidents that are recorded here from Peter, who influenced his life so greatly. We are looking at the tenth chapter, the opening twelve verses, which we began last week on the subject of divorce, as our Lord instructs His disciples.

Let me read the text so you have it in mind.

"Getting up, He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. Crowds gathered around Him again and according to His custom, He once more began to teach them. Some Pharisees came up to Jesus testing Him and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. And He answered and said to them, 'What did Moses command you?' They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.' But Jesus said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart, He wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female, for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall become one flesh, so they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.'

"In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. And He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.'"

Now we asked the question last time, what does God think about divorce? And for the short answer, I took you back to Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament, chapter 2 verse 16, in which God says, "I hate divorce...I hate divorce." In spite of the fact that God hates divorce, 400 years after Malachi, as the Lord arrives in the world, the incarnate Christ, He comes to a Judaism that has a highly developed tolerance for divorce, in spite of what the Old Testament said.

In fact, they had developed a system of divorce in which a man could divorce his wife for absolutely anything, all he had to do was do the paper work, hand her a document and send her away. Here our Lord addresses this issue because He wants His apostles and His disciples and all of us to know the right teaching, the right truth about divorce.

Now we find Him, according to verse 1, having concluded His Galilean ministry, and actually, by the time we get in to this chapter in Mark, He has also concluded His Judean ministry which lasted quite a number of months. Mark gives us no record of that at all. If you want the record of that period of ministry, look at Luke 10 through 18, and those months are covered in a summary fashion by Luke. So we jump from the Galilean ministry right over the top of the Judean ministry, and here we find our Lord beyond the Jordan in the area called Peraea, often referred to then as His Peraean ministry. This is the last little bit of ministry He does before He goes down to Jericho and in chapter 11 enters Jerusalem for the final week of His life. So we're at the end of His earthly ministry here, virtually at the end of it. And He is teaching His disciples some very, very important lessons. And this one happens to be about the subject of divorce.

It is initiated because of verse 2, some Pharisees who dogged His steps no matter where He went, came up to Jesus testing Him. That was always the issue. They were putting Him to the test with the purpose of discrediting Him. They wanted Him to say things that would alienate Him from the people. Since divorce was popular among the leaders, it was popular among the people, the men especially. And they wanted Jesus to say what they knew He believed because they had heard it before. They wanted Him to say that divorce was wrong and they wanted Him to condemn everybody that was divorced and that would set Him against the leaders and against the people, irritate the people and thus Jesus would not be nearly so popular.

But even more than that, it happened to be that they confront Him on the subject in Peraea because they're in the territory under Herod Antipas and Herod had divorced his wife and married the divorced wife of his own brother and committed incest with her because she was his relative. And John the Baptist had confronted this divorce and Herod chopped his head off. They were hoping that if Jesus took John's position on divorce, Herod might rise again and destroy Jesus the way he had destroyed John the Baptist. So they had some plans to discredit Jesus and to even have Him killed by bringing up the question.

Jesus, in His normal fashion, answers the question astutely and as wisely as only the Son of God could. So the confrontation is in verse 2. The clarification of the issue comes in verses 3 and following. God hates divorce, and here's why.

Go down to verse 6, "From the beginning of creation," Jesus says, "God made them male and female." When God created, He made one man and one woman, not a spare woman in case he didn't like the first one. Not a spare man in case she didn't like the first one. One and one, and that was it, that's the way it was from the beginning of creation and for this reason, "A man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall become one flesh." The indivisible number, that's what a marriage is, it's a one...it's the indivisible number. They are no longer two, they are one flesh, what therefore God has joined together, let no man separate. Just as God brings life into the world, God is

involved in a marriage. He brings two together. It's His work. That's why He hates divorce because from the beginning He designed one man, one woman to be brought together, becoming one for life, not separated. He hates divorce.

If this is normal, if this is the way God designed human beings, why is there such conflict in marriage? Why is divorce so common, not only in our culture but in ancient cultures and in all cultures?

Well the answer to that comes from Genesis 3:16, we saw that last time. When sin came into the world, when Eve sinned and Adam followed in sin, the race was cursed. Adam was cursed, he was cursed to labor by the sweat of his brow and earn his bread. And the woman was cursed and she was cursed, Genesis 3:16 says, by having to suffer pain in child bearing and then this..."Your desire shall be toward your husband and he will rule over you." That curse spells out the conflict in marriage. And the language, as we saw last time, means that instead of her willingly, graciously submitting to him and he tenderly, compassionately leading her, she has a desire to dominate him and he has an overbearing reaction of over-dominating her. That's the conflict between women's liberation and male chauvinism. That's all a part of the curse. That brings trouble into a marriage...a sinful woman with strong will wants her way, an equally sinful man with a strong will wants to dominate her.

Conflict comes in because of the curse of corruption as a result of the Fall. This makes divorce an issue because ultimately the conflict can come to the level where people can't stand to be together any more and that leads to separation and divorce. And yet, you go to the very end of the Old Testament, the book of Malachi, as far as you can get from Genesis, and it says, "God hates divorce....God hates divorce." And it further says in Malachi 2:13 to 16, that whoever divorces splatters his garments with filth. It's a sin-splattered garment of the one who divorces, God hates divorce. It's never been any different because He designed marriage between a man and a woman to be for life.

And so, we looked at the clarification and the clarification, really the answer that Jesus uses, is He goes right back to Genesis. Instead of jeopardizing Himself with the people by giving some opinion isolated from the Scripture, He simply goes back to the beginning, from the beginning of creation. Everybody knew Genesis 1, everybody knew Genesis 2, everybody knew exactly what it said. So He stands on the ground of biblical authority. He stands on the ground of Scripture. That's the foundation.

But He also says in verse 3, and He initiates the discussion in this process of clarification, "He answered and said to them, 'What did Moses command you?'" This is a very important question for Him to ask because He knows Moses did speak about divorce. And, in fact, Moses actually gave a command with regard to divorce. So our Lord speaks to them, they're the Pharisees, they are the experts in the Law, they have clear knowledge of the Old Testament Law, and they have found an Old Testament passage on which they can build their tolerance for divorce. They're not interested in

following divine ideal, they're not interested in one man, one woman for life. They want to change their wives as often as they feel like it. And so they need an Old Testament passage to do that, and frankly, there's only one. And they have camped on that one where Moses gave a command. What is that? Deuteronomy 24...go to Deuteronomy 24, you're going to find this very interesting...Deuteronomy 24.

By this time, the people had been subjected to the interpretations of Scripture by rabbis. And rabbis had the authority, you might say, and Scripture didn't because the people wouldn't venture to interpret the Scripture on their own, they would follow the interpretation of the rabbis and the more popular rabbi, being Rabbi Hillel, had accommodated divorce for any reason, for any person, for any time. And they had based it on this passage in Deuteronomy 24. Here we go back to Moses who is the author of the first five books of the Bible called the Pentateuch, five books of Law. This is what the Spirit of God inspired Moses to write.

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, because that's what...that's what will happen, it's inevitable. And if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of the house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who has sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife since she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance."

And so they said, there it is, Moses says that you can send your wife away for an indecency. There it is, you can send her away for an indecency. An indecency, what is that? Well, they concluded it's anything you want it to be. You can fill up the word indecency with just about anything. This is an open kind of black check for divorce. Indecency, the rabbis said, could be like Hillel said, going around with loose hair, spinning in the streets so that other men see your ankles, or talking to men, or being unkind to your mother-in-law, or speaking to your husband so loud that the neighbors hear, or anything else. And you can give her a piece of paper and send her away.

Now I want you to look back at that passage for a minute. Do you see a command to do that in verse 1? I don't see a command in verse 1. When a man...is describing a possibility, it's describing a potential incident. A man takes a wife, he marries her, it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes. He doesn't like her because he's found some indecency in her. And he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand and sends her out of the house. She leaves. She goes and marries somebody else. Is there a command in there? Not a command in there. That simply describes something that happens. A man gets married, doesn't like her, divorces her, she goes and marries somebody else. That's all it says.

Then verse 3 says, "He doesn't like her either." He divorces her. That happens. The command doesn't come until verse 4. Here's the only command. "The former husband who originally sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife." So the point...the command is this, if you divorce your wife and she marries somebody else, you can never take her back. This is a very good principle. This is a very good preventative so that men don't say, "I think I like to try another wife for a few months, and if I don't like her, I'll take you back." You can't do that. Once you divorce your wife, she marries somebody else, there's no swapping back. But when you say goodbye, the assumption is they're going to be married because they need to be cared for and provided for, you can't take them back, so you better think a long time about giving away the wife of your youth, giving away the original love of your life giving away the mother of your children, giving away the family. You better think a lot about that because once she connects to another person, you can never have her back. That's the only command here. It's not a command to divorce, it's a command not to remarry a woman that you have divorced who has then been married to someone else.

It doesn't give any grounds for divorce at all. You say, "What about adultery?" Oh, adultery had in the Law of Moses the death penalty, so it wasn't a matter of divorce for adultery, it was a matter of death for adultery. So Moses isn't giving any grounds for divorce.

Well the question then is, what is this indecency thing that people were sending their wives away on the basis of? What is this indecency? What did the rabbis...what did they...what justification did they have for drawing out of it all these silly things?

Let me tell you what the word means. When you look at a text of Scripture and you see a word indecency, that's a word, look in a lexicon or a dictionary and see what the word means. That will help a little bit but it means the nakedness of a thing, the nakedness of a thing. It doesn't mean that these women were naked, in that sense, you know, Jewish women were very modest. They were covered from the top of their heads to the ground. That's not the issue here. But the nakedness of a thing is simply sort of a reference to shamefulness.

Now this word in this same kind of phrase is used back in chapter 23. So what you look for when you're looking to interpret a word is the context. And if you see the same word in a similar setting in the same book, just a chapter away, you've got a good connection there. So go back to chapter 23 verse 13, let's find here the same word in the same kind of phrase.

"You need to have a spade or a shovel among your tools and it shall be when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and shall turn to cover up your excrement. Since the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to defeat your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy...and here's the same word...He must not see anything indecent among you for He will turn away from you."

This is talking about normal social responsibility...normal values in a civilized culture. You just do things that are respectable. You don't do things that are shameful. That's the word. It's not talking about adultery. It's talking about things that are indecent, that are disrespectful of others. And that's exactly the thing that these people who were divorcing their wives were looking at. "Well, we've got a big category for that. We think it's a shame when she burns the bread. We think it's a shame when she says this. We think it's a shame when she acts this way."

And that's what they were doing. Women actually didn't commit a lot of adultery. Why? They didn't want to die. So the idea was, you know, if you don't like your husband, you can bring shame upon his head by doing things that are just indecent. And you can embarrass yourself, of course, in the process, but also embarrass your husband. So whatever this is, something on the edge, some kind of shameless, indecent, habitually sinful, shameful behavior, something short of adultery, and when things like that...there could be actual things like that, but they extrapolated from there to just make it anything they thought was indecent.

So Moses is not giving any grounds for divorce. He's saying, "If you do divorce your wife," listen, "even for that, that's an illegitimate divorce...that's an illegitimate divorce because you now know she's going to marry somebody and when she marries somebody, that's going to be adultery, cause that's not a ground for divorce." That kind of behavior, as shameful as it is, is not a ground for divorce. Living on the edge, being indecent, that is not grounds for divorce. And the proof is, she's marrying somebody else, she becomes an adulterer. Then if the death penalty were to be exacted, it could be exacted. And the point...the command he gives is once that happens, you can't ever take her back as your wife again because she's defiled and it's an abomination to the Lord.

By the way, it didn't take long after the Law of Leviticus 20 about executing an adulterer was given for the Lord to be merciful in the application of that law. God gave that law to show His attitude toward adultery. But we also recognize, the New Testament tells us that this time of ignorance God overlooked in His mercy. He overlooked it in His mercy. And certainly when you get to the time of our Lord Jesus, not only are not people being stoned for adultery or killed for adultery except when the Jews wanted to do it, like when they picked up stones to throw on the woman in John's gospel, not only are not people being killed for adultery, they're happily swapping wives and delighting in doing it thinking it's scripturally allowed.

So Moses gave a command, but it was not a command to divorce. It was not a permission to divorce. It was a command not to remarry and illegitimately divorced woman. That's the only command because she was defiled and it was just adultery after that. No command at all.

Let's go back then to Mark. So why does...why does the Old Testament even recognize a divorce? Why would it even be tolerated at all? Why would God be merciful with regard to the death penalty for

adulterers? Why would it even be allowed ever?

Verse 4, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." Why? And they're referring to Deuteronomy 24, it really wasn't a command, it wasn't really a permission, it was a command not to remarry a divorced woman. They say, "Well Moses permitted it." And Jesus' answer is, "Look, the commandment that Moses did give recognizes the hardness of your heart. It's going to happen because you have...the Greek word is *sklerokardia*, sclerosis of the heart. The commandment is not to divorce because you can't ever take her back. It's not for you to divorce for anything you want, anything you deemed to be indecent behavior. The only reason that there's any concession at all...the only reason Moses even talks about these issues is because he knows how hard-hearted you are. And that's reality. Here they were, so far from God's ideal, they were shedding their wives at their latest whim and one of the indecencies they even state in the rabbinical writings is that she's uglier than someone else, in their view.

The command then relates only to the remarriage. So the Law of God is held up. One man, male and female, leave father and mother, become one flesh, the indivisible number, no longer two but one, God joins them together, don't separate. I hate divorce. Moses doesn't command it. He only commands things that are intended to stop you from doing it because you can never take that person back once they remarry.

Very tight, that's really it. Well the disciples get the message. Verse 10, they come into the house somewhere there in Peraea and the disciples began questioning Him about this again. They want some clarification on this.

He said, "Okay, let's make it real clear. Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she's committing adultery." Get it? If you divorce your wife and marry somebody else, you commit adultery. If you divorce your husband and marry somebody else, you commit adultery. God hates divorce because it breaks the seventh commandment. It's adultery.

You say, "Well wait a minute. Didn't God permit divorce?" No. God did not permit remarriage to an illegitimately divorced person. That's the permission in the commandment of Deuteronomy 24. But the hearts of the people were so hard. Aren't there...aren't there some impossible situations where God might see divorce as a lesser evil?

Yes....yes. On what basis? Let's go to Deuteronomy 7, I'll give you an illustration, Deuteronomy 7. Now this is the second giving of the Law, people ready to go into the land, here's their instruction...instruction. You're going into the land of Canaan now. You're going to a land full of idolaters, you're going into a land full of people who are the sons of Satan, you're going into a land full of people who reject the true and living God. You're going into a land of people who will be an

influence on you and God circumscribed everything He could around them to protect them. They had their own dietary laws, so they couldn't easily socialize with the Gentiles, the idolatrous Gentiles because they had such distinctive laws in terms of eating and drinking and cooking. God stylized their clothes in such a way that they couldn't have the easy access, they always stood out like sore thumbs. God prescribed all kinds of behaviors that isolated them from the nations for their own protection. It was like a...it was like kind of spiritual quarantine as they went in. And He knew what the potential was.

"When the Lord your God," verse 1, "brings you into the land, you're entering to possess it and clears away the nations to make you free in the land to live there. The Hittites, Girgashites,

Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you." God's going to clear them out and give you the promised land. "And when the Lord your God delivers them from before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them." You've got to wipe them out.; "Make no covenant with them, show no favor to them," cause they're deadly. You're going to be a tool of judgment.

Then verse 3, "Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them and you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons." Don't marry pagans. Don't give your children to pagans. Don't do it. "For," verse 4, "they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; and the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you." Wow! Don't intermarry.

Well, guess what? They did intermarry. And the story of what happens is told in the tenth chapter of Ezra. Ezra chapter 10, verse 1, "Ezra is praying, making confession, weeping, prostrating himself before the house of God." Ezra 10, "A very large assembly, men, women and children, gathered to him from Israel, the people wept bitterly." They're all weeping now. They're all weeping.

Why are they weeping? "Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, said to Ezra, 'We have been unfaithful to our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land.'" We did exactly what we were told not to do. Then verse 3, "Let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives and their children, according to the counsel of my Lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise! For this matter is your responsibility, we will be with you, be courageous and act."

Can you imagine that? Mass divorce...mass divorce because divorce, listen, is a lesser evil. God hates divorce but He hates idolatry worse. It's a lesser evil. "Ezra rose from the house of God and went into the house...the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib. He didn't eat bread, didn't drink water, was mourning over the unfaithfulness of the exiles. And they called

them all together in Jerusalem, they all assembled, a people, the leaders, everybody came.” Verse 17, “They investigated all the men who had married foreign wives.” Verse 18, “Among the sons of the priests who had married foreign wives,” and then do you see what it does? It goes and lists all the people who did that. Puts their name there...huh?...for everybody to know forever. And verse 44 ends the chapter, “They had all married foreign wives and some of them had wives by whom they had children.”

What is wrong with this? This is...this is disastrous for the future of Israel. This is disastrous for tribal integrity, for the messianic line, for the future promises to Israel. This is potentially the end of the people of God. Israel is immoral. Israel is adulteress, idolatrous. I think the immorality and the idolatry of the Jewish people is evident in the fact that they were very eager to marry idolatrous women who had a completely different standard of morality, who were guilty of immoral behavior as a way of life. They broke their covenants with their Jewish wives and it's a tragedy. It is evidence of their immorality. It is evidence of their idolatry that they did this.

And God watches this happen. And in Isaiah 50, God speaks to Israel and He says, “Why are you doing this? Why have you gone after false gods?” And now we get out of the actual marriages of Ezra in to the spiritual idolatry. And in Isaiah, Isaiah's prophesying the captivity of the people of God, judgment on the people of God, and the indictment is in chapter 50 verse 1 where God says, “Why are you connected to false gods? Have I given you a bill of divorce? You are adulteress, I have not divorced you...I have not divorced you.”

God's heart is broken. God is patient. You know, God was patient with their idolatry for 700 years. Look at Jeremiah chapter 3...Jeremiah chapter 3 and verse 8. God says, I've had enough...I've had enough. What did...verse 6, what did faithless Israel do? “Went up on every high hill, under every green tree and was a harlot there.” What's that talking about, high hills and green trees? The places where idols were worshiped and sometimes they were worshiped by immoral behavior.

“And I thought after she had done all these things, she will return to Me; but she didn't return.” This is the northern Kingdom Israel and her treacherous sister saw it, Judah, the southern Kingdom. “And I saw for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I sent her away and gave her a writ of divorce.” Finally God says, “I divorce you.” And the Assyrians came and they plundered the northern kingdom and they took away the ten tribes and they were lost to history. There were members of each of those ten tribes in the southern kingdom, so the twelve tribes have continued. But those in the north were devastated, never returned, never ever returned. There was continual adultery, continual spiritual adultery with idols and unfaithfulness to the true husband of Israel, God, that caused God to give a bill of divorce. It was a bill of divorce that involved death because when the Assyrians came, they massacred many of those Jews. Israel, immoral adulteress, impenitent, covenant broken, incessant spiritual adultery with other false gods for hundreds of years and God, as Israel's husband, finally

says, "That's enough, I've had enough." And he even comments, Jeremiah does, the treacherous sister Judah is doing the same thing and it wasn't long until Babylon came and took her away.

These incidents indicate spiritual infidelity and demonstrate that the only Old Testament grounds for divorce is adultery. And God divorced even His wife for adultery. The point then would be that where the Law of capital punishment for adultery is no longer in force by the mercy of God, divorce is an option.

This becomes very personal in Matthew 1, where Joseph, that godly young man, finds that his betrothed Mary, that godly young girl, is pregnant. He doesn't understand it. Verse 19, "Her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her." He could have publicly disgraced her, but he was a righteous man which means what he did was right. "And so he planned to divorce her secretly." A righteous man could divorce an adulterous, fornicating wife. That was a righteous thing.

Divorce? God hates it. Is there ever a tolerance for it? Adultery is the model in the Old Testament and the only one. Anything short of that, any indecency is not enough...it isn't enough. Adultery is the one thing that breaks the bond.

Well look at Mark 10. When you read those last couple of verses, Mark doesn't say anything about adultery. He just says, "If you divorce your wife and marry somebody else, you commit adultery. And if you divorce your husband and marry somebody else, you commit adultery." What about the exception?

Well let's talk about the exception. We already know that in the Old Testament there's a pattern for adultery if the death penalty is not exacted. And we see that pattern in God's commands to the people in Ezra's time and we see that in God's actual action Himself, spiritually speaking, toward Israel.

What about adultery? Is that grounds for divorce? Please go back to Matthew 19, that's the parallel passage. That's the parallel passage to what we're looking at. And Matthew records that Jesus also said some other things. You remember now? It says in verse 10 of Mark 10, "They were asking Him questions." Well Mark doesn't record the whole dialogue, but you compare it with Matthew and you get the whole thing. Verse 9, "I say to you, whoever divorces his wife except for immorality, *porneia*, sexual sin, and marries another woman, commits adultery." So, if you divorce for the cause of sexual sin and marry somebody else, that's not adultery. Okay? That's the exception.

You say, "Well, is that something only Matthew recorded that? Is that something debatable?" No, because that's what Jesus always taught. Go back to Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount, verse 32, "I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife except for the reason of sexual sin, makes her

commit adultery and whoever marries a divorced woman without that reason also commits adultery.” It’s the same thing He said in Matthew 5. The disciples knew that and the Jews knew that. The only grounds...and it’s consistent in the Old and the New...up to this point in divine revelation is adultery, on the grounds of immorality, fornication...which sweeps up all sexual sin. Divorce is not God’s will. God hates divorce. Adultery doesn’t have to be the end of a marriage. How long did God wait? Seven-hundred years. How about Hosea. Remember Hosea? God says, “Take a wife.” And he took a wife named Gomer...I think anybody who would marry a woman named Gomer has got trouble coming. But anyway, he marries this girl called Gomer. She turns out to give him some children. Then she becomes a prostitute, sells her body and she’s gone. And God says, “Go find her. Buy her back, pay the price and redeem her, take her back.” And it’s a magnificent story, it really is.

He goes into the marketplace where she’s being sold on the block and he treats her like a virgin bride. Takes her back. And God says that’s the picture of My relationship to Ephraim, divorced and one day in the future bought back.

So there’s a pattern here as well, to say the just an act of sexual sin doesn’t necessarily mean the end. There’s a place for restoration. There’s a place for forgiveness. But I think that’s in cases where there’s genuine penitence, genuine remorse, a real forgiveness and the pattern stops. Where there’s impenitence, or where there’s continuance, then I think that is precisely why this exception is given. And that’s, in someways, to be determined carefully and thoughtfully and prayerfully by the person who has been sinned against, the innocent spouse.

Adultery would be enough, by the way, to bring the death of that person. Then you would be free to remarry, wouldn’t you? Just because God spares the life of an adulterer, doesn’t penalize the innocent party.

There was a view floating around years ago, and I met people who got stuck in this thing, that even if your partner commits adultery, you can never remarry...never. And I knew people who literally...I knew one lady whose husband was a missionary, they were missionaries in South Africa, or South America, rather, and he decided that he was a homosexual. He had all these homosexual liaisons going on and he divorced her and left. And she was told you can never marry the rest of your life.

Because God is merciful and doesn’t kill him, is she to be punished the rest of her life? If the law was exacted on him, he’d be dead and she’d be free. So God’s mercy to the one doesn’t become a burden to the other. So where there is grounds for divorce, there’s always grounds for remarriage. That’s the point of it.

Well, this is pretty tight though, right? So look at verse 10 of Matthew 19. “The disciples said to Him,” they’re real pragmatists, “Hey, if the relationship of a man with his wife is like this, better not to marry. I mean, when you get her, you’re stuck and that is it for good. I mean, you can’t get rid of her for

anything.”

Remember now, they've been told they could dump their wife for spinning around, for showing her ankles, for messing with her hair. Now they've just...they're just getting the picture here. Boy, this is serious stuff. Wow! Better not to get married. Cause, you see, the rabbis said, “Among those who will never behold the face of hell are those who have had a bad wife because she's been his hell.” Oh, that's convenient.

Another rabbi said, “A bad wife is like leprosy, divorce her and be cured.” Another rabbi said, “If a man has a bad wife, it's a religious duty to divorce her.” Now the disciples are finding out, if you've got a bad wife, hang on, it's for life. Get to work on turning her into a good wife.

They realized the tight thing that He's saying. They get it. They get it. Better not to marry. And our Lord is so practical. Verse 11, “Not all men can accept that statement, only those to whom it's been given.” Then He talks about eunuchs, people who don't have normal sexual relationships. He's saying, “Look, this isn't for everybody.” Singleness has a place, but it's better to marry than to burn with lust and desire.

And by the way, marriage is the grace of life. And here's a verse all you ladies know, “A man who finds a good wife, finds a good thing. A wife is a gift from the Lord,” Proverbs 19:14. A wife is the best gift God can ever give a man, a husband is the best gift that God could ever give a woman. It's the best thing in life. It's the greatest joy in life. It's the greatest fulfillment in life.

The disciples were talking on a very theoretical and pragmatic level. “It's not good for man to be...what?...alone.” It is the grace of life. It is the joy of all joys, the blessings of all blessings. It is the path to fruitfulness, to children, to blessing of children, the blessing of grandchildren, the blessing of family.

So He says, “Look, it's a nice sentiment, but you're made to be married. Find somebody. Don't look for the Messiah, just find somebody. I keep saying that to girls, you know, the Messiah came and went, you've got to settle for somebody else. Not everybody can receive it. He means, “Not everybody can be fulfilled in a single state.” Not everybody...literally the word means to have space or room for that. You need to be married.

We say, “Well, if marriage is so hard...”

Well look, let me tell you how to make a marriage work. Two people perfectly related to Jesus Christ will be perfectly related to each other. Two people who seek to honor Christ, will have no problem honoring each other. How do you treat your spouse? You treat your spouse the way you would treat Christ because when you receive that person, you receive Christ. You treat that person the way

Christ would treat that person.

People sometimes say to me, "You seem to have a good marriage." I do have a good marriage. I'm ecstatic about the marriage that God has given to me. I love my wife, more now than I've ever loved her. I can't even...I don't even know where I stop and she starts. That's the way it is. She has not been married to a perfect man, but she has been married to a man who pursues the things in her life that I believe Christ would want for her. And the same for me. She pursues in my life the things that Christ would want for me. And it's the joy of all joys, it's a supreme joy.

And I'll tell you, young people. I know that some of you are hanging around waiting for the perfect person to come up. Look, just find somebody in whom Christ lives who desires to serve Christ and don't postpone marriage needlessly. Get married, this is the grace of life. We need more kids in the nursery (laughter). The Kingdom grows that way. You know, hanging around until you're 30 years of age, just checking everybody out. Guess what? They're checking you out and they're not thrilled either. So just...(laughter)...just find somebody. You're wasting great years, do you understand that? You're wasting great, great years. If I could wish anything for myself, I wish that I had gotten married younger cause it's such a wonderful thing, a blessed thing, God-honoring thing. In Christ your marriage can be anything that Christ wants it to be, if you walk with Him. You're in the best of circumstances here to have a sanctifying influence.

Let me tell you something. It's not good to be single. It's good to have a sanctifying influence in your life right next to you 24 hours a day. And you want a strong believer. Just find one and let that person be a spiritual influence on you.

Father, thank You for this time, this morning, in Your Word. Thank You for the clarity with which it speaks to this important issue. And we just pray for the families here, for the single people here, we have so many single people in this church. I just pray, Lord, that Your Holy Spirit will start a revival of matrimony in our church and hook them all up together and get them married and let them have families and honor you in that wonderful way. Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and pass on righteousness from one generation to the next. I pray, Lord, that You'll bless the marriages that exist. May Your Holy Spirit make them what You would want them to be. May the marriages in our church be a picture of the relationship of Christ to His church, as Ephesians 5 paints it. Thank You for all that You're doing, and for the gift that You've given us in Your Word. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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