

Attachment: The Gospel and Our Families

The Gospel and Divorce

Dr. David Platt

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THE GOSPEL AND DIVORCE
Genesis 2:24; Deuteronomy 24:1-4

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, I want to invite you to open with me to 1 Corinthians 7. I want to be honest with you. I am uneasy as I stand before you. I shared last week how I've been convicted in this series on the gospel and our families of two factors that are severely affecting the gospel and our families today. We're going to dive into the gospel and divorce and, next week, the gospel and homosexuality.

I know that as soon as I say the word "divorce," the very mention of the word carries a huge weight for many, if not, most people. I think it would be safe to say that just about every one of our lives, in some way, has been affected by divorce, whether it's personally, directly, or in our families, among friends, or in the church. I know that, as soon as I say the word, that all kinds of emotions, sense of sorrow, loss, tragedy, disappointment, anger, regret, guilt, all of those emotions sweep across this room. There are a few things that are more painful than divorce and I don't believe the prevalence of divorce in our culture or the affect of divorce on our culture can be overestimated. In fact, I would take it a step deeper and say I don't believe the prevalence of divorce in the church or the effect of divorce on the church can be overestimated. I realize that this is a particularly sensitive issue when it comes to this particular faith family and so I'm uneasy.

I think there are two main reasons. Number one, I'm uneasy because we live in a culture where divorce is so easy. By that, I don't mean it's not difficult or it's not costly, but there may not be any other time in history where it's been easier for us to get a divorce. You can go online, pay a minimal cost, and do this through the Internet. You can do it via computer, just like that, tonight, tomorrow. It's easy. We live in a divorce-ready culture.

And I'm uneasy, second, because I want to shepherd you tonight not hurt you. I know that this whole issue uncovers wounds freshly, old wounds and present wounds. Part of me wishes that we could split up into two groups and talk about divorce in two different groups. One group of people who are married and have not experienced divorce. And the other group, people who have experienced divorce. The Word is the same, but how to communicate that truth would be very different if I was speaking to you one-on-one, depending on the background there. Obviously, that luxury is not here. There is a way to approach divorce that is preventative and there is a way to approach divorce that is redemptive and restorative. So the challenge is how to do both of those with a variety of different circumstances represented around this room.

So let's pray that God, over the next few moments, by His grace, would help us to see His Word, hear His Word, to understand His Word as it applies to each of our lives and the different circumstances that are represented here.

What we're going to do is we're going to look at four different passages in Scripture on divorce, and we're going to read them one after the other here at the start. Then we're going to put them together in addition to one other passage we won't read here at the start.

Five major passages on divorce, there not the only passages, but I would say the primary passages on divorce in Scripture. We're going to put them together and we're going to consider the implications the Bible speaks about when it comes to divorce.

The way I want us to divide it is I want us to think about the church and divorce. These are just going to be some reflections on how the church has responded to divorce based on these texts. Then we're going to look specifically at what God says about divorce and then close out with practical implications. What does this look like? What's the takeaway from this Word for each of us in our different circumstances tonight. So 1 Corinthians 7 is really the most logical place to start and we're going to work our way backwards from 1 Corinthians 7 back to the very beginning of the Bible. So read with me in 1 Corinthians 7:10.

This is Paul writing. It's a passage we studied a couple weeks ago when we talked about singleness and Paul says to the married:

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace (1 Cor. 7:10-15).

What Paul does in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 is he quotes from Jesus in the Gospels and so I want you to turn a bit to the left. Find Matthew 19.

This is actually not the place where Paul is most likely quoting from. There are three Gospels that mention Jesus' words on divorce: Matthew 19, Mark 10, and Luke 16. Paul is most likely quoting from Luke 16:18. Mark 10:1-12 also has Jesus teaching on divorce and then here in Matthew 19. The reason we're going to look at Matthew is because there is something here that is not seen in Mark and Luke. It doesn't mean these are different stories or contradicting stories. It means that they are different accounts. Jesus says things a little differently in different places. Same truths. We're going to look at Matthew 19:3. Listen to what happened there.

"Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?' 'Haven't you read,' he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh"? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.' 'Why then,' they asked, 'did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?' Jesus replied, 'Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.' The disciples

said to him, 'If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry' (Matt. 19:3-10).

Now, here in this passage, Jesus alludes to quotes from two different passages in the Old Testament. So I want you to keep turning left, and come with me to Deuteronomy 24. It's the fifth book in the Bible, Deuteronomy 24. The whole question that guides the conversation in Matthew 19 is when a group comes to Jesus and says, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" And the background is Deuteronomy 24, the Law of God here, and they're asking questions about what the Law of God allows - and I think that's significant.

While you're finding Deuteronomy 24, just as a side note, because this is a question that, unfortunately, we are not asking today in the church. We're not asking what does God's Law say? All too often, we are bypassing God's Law and saying, "What does the law of the government say about divorce?" And if the law of the government says it's okay, well, then, yes, of course, it's okay. We need to see what the Law of God says, and that's the question they were asking. I hope that's the question we will find ourselves asking that. What does God's Word say about divorce? Not what does our culture, what does the world say? What does the Word say? Deuteronomy 24:1, this is what had happened in the Old Testament. This is Moses speaking. He says:

If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her 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 (Deut. 24:1-4).

So that's the context that leads into this passage in Matthew 19. Keep turning to your left, and you'll see the place where Jesus quotes from in His discussion of divorce, Genesis 2. First book in the Bible, second chapter, Genesis 2. This is a passage that we have looked at numerous times in this series. If it not underlined in your Bible, I would encourage you to underline it. Genesis 2:24.

This is so foundational. What was going on here in the beginning is not just a nice story about creation. It was setting the foundation for everything that was to come. The whole picture we have in the rest of Scripture rooted here in Genesis 2:24. It's what Jesus quotes from in Matthew 19, He says -quoting from Genesis 2:24 - "*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*" And so you put these four passages together, what does the Word of God say about divorce?

The Church and Divorce...

We Have Insulated Ourselves

I want us to start with some reflections, and this is basically how the church is to respond to divorce and these are more pastoral reflections based on these texts. When I think about how the church has responded to divorce, I think, first, we have all too often - we have

insulated ourselves. By that, I mean that I believe there is a deficiency, a famine, a dearth, a void of teaching in the church on divorce. I've asked various people, not just in this faith family, in other faith families, "When was the last time you heard a sermon on divorce? What do you remember about that teaching on divorce?"

And some people said, "I can't remember a time." This is a problem when half of the people in our culture and nearly half of the people in the church have divorce as a reality personally in their lives. We've insulated ourselves.

We Have Isolated Each Other

Not only have we insulated ourselves, but we have – second, we've isolated each other. The result of our lack of understanding of what the Word teaches about divorce affects the way we relate to each other; and all too often, those who have divorce in their past are almost isolated. There's this picture of people thinking, "Well, I'm not sure how to address that" or if somebody is contemplating divorce, "How do I relate to them? How do I walk with them through that?" And we have such a lack of understanding about what the Word says about divorce that it results in a picture of isolation all too often, in the church, for anyone associated with divorce. That is not a good thing. That is not a picture of a family of faith.

We Have Ignored the Problem

We've insulated ourselves. We've isolated each other. And the third way we've responded, which concerns me most, is the fact that I believe we have ignored the problem. Divorce has received so little attention in the context of the church. We prefer not to talk about it. We prefer not to deal with it. At least in the context of the church, and that is a big mistake. It's not just a big mistake. It's wrong. It's sinful to address conflict in marriage and the picture of divorce outside of the context of the church. It is intended to be addressed inside the context of the church, and it's wrong not to.

You say, "Dave, what do you mean?" The problem is Christians are running to the courts when they should be running to the church to talk about divorce. Go back with me to 1 Corinthians. I want you to see 1 Corinthians 6.

If a Christian contemplates divorce today, they go and talk with a divorce lawyer and they go to divorce court and this is wrong. It is wrong. It is unbiblical to do this. It's what 1 Corinthians 6 is talking about here. Disputes among believers are to be handled in the context of the church. Paul is shocked when he is writing this letter to find that believers are taking one another to court. Listen to what he says, 1 Corinthians 6:1.

If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers (1 Cor. 6:1-8).

God forbids Christians taking other Christians to court to handle disputes before unbelievers. This is a picture that is intended to be handled in a context of the church, and you see how this affects the way we have approached divorce. Where did we get the idea that the best way to handle conflict in marriage or divorce was to go to, oftentimes, pagan divorce lawyers and pagan judges to let pagan judges and pagan divorce lawyers figure out what is best for our families? This is not a biblical picture of the way this should be addressed.

On a side note, I want to be careful here, because I know that there are many followers of Christ in law who bring great glory to Christ, but I do want to say this very clearly. If you make your living and build your industry and your livelihood on making divorce cheap and easy for people, then you scorn the design of God and disgrace the glory of Christ in marriage and you will face the judgment of God for that. So I urge you to repent and seek forgiveness before it is too late.

This is why we don't have time to dive into more than four or five passages. We've already got four or five passages on the table. We don't need to bring another one in, but there's a picture in the New Testament of how conflict is to be addressed in the church – Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5, other places. This is something the elders have been diving into. We need to see, biblically, how to address conflict in the church.

But suffice to say at this point, this is where it should happen. It should happen in the context of the church. So we can't ignore divorce in the church and leave it to the state to regulate the picture of marriage. This is – I'm not trying to be a revolutionary here – the biblical picture of how we should approach conflict with each other, especially when it comes to divorce.

What happens when we do that? 1 Corinthians 6, number one, we are discrediting the testimony of the church when we do this before unbelievers. Paul says, "Handle this within the church." We're discrediting the testimony of the church; and, second, we're disgracing the name of Christ. What are we saying to an increasingly godless court system when half of the divorce cases they have in front of them are between Christians? What are we saying about the glory of Christ and love of Christ, the picture of Christ and His bride? What are we saying to the world when we address conflict like this? We're discrediting the testimony of the church and disgracing the name of Christ.

The Responsibility of the Church...

So what should the church do? Here's the responsibility of the church. Twofold, number one, we comfort one another with love. We share life with each other. We don't isolate each other. We don't insulate ourselves from the problems in each other's lives. We don't ignore each other. We walk alongside each other. We serve each other. We stand by each other. We take divorced brothers and sisters and we uphold them, we strengthen them, we serve them, we help them and we lift up their children. This is what we do in church. We're a family of faith, a community of faith.

And when brothers or sisters are walking through marital difficulties, we walk alongside them. We don't ignore or isolate struggles that each other are going through. We walk alongside, and we help them. We weep with them. Weep over the Word with them. We comfort one another with love.

Second, not only do we comfort one another with love, but we confront one another with truth. We must be careful in our comfort not to comfort with falsehood, not to comfort with lies. That's no comfort at all, and this is all too often what happens when it comes to this

issue. We get in situations where we want to comfort people. We say what we feel would be best, regardless of what Scriptures says. Or we even twist Scripture to make it say what accommodates what we think would be best.

We need to trust this Word. It is good. I am not saying it is easy. Take it from me. This truth is not easy truth. It is tough truth, and I know that it will be tough. It will be hard, even for many in this room. In the short run, it is tough to confront one another for the truth. I trust, though – I'm trusting that, in the long run, this Word will bear countless blessings for future generations; and it will bring a biblical hope for every single person in this room. The Word is good. It can be trusted.

This is why Proverbs 27:6 says, "*Wounds from a friend can be trusted.*" I pray that, if there are wounds tonight, that you will hear them from a friend. I pray for that. We do both of these. We comfort one another with love and confront one another with truth. We don't ignore, don't isolate. We don't leave each other to walk through the spiritual journey alone. We don't comfort without confronting. That's deceptive. It's no comfort to comfort with falsehood. Likewise, we don't confront without comforting. We don't bring truth without comforting and weeping, walking alongside people. It's both comfort and confrontation. I pray that both will be evident in this faith family. I pray that both will be evident.

God and Divorce...

So what is the truth that we comfort with? What does God say about divorce? What I want to show you is four truths based on these passages, and many of them focus on one passage in particular. Four truths that concern God and divorce. How does God respond to divorce? We'll start with the first truth.

God Created Marriage

Number one, God created marriage. This is the picture in Genesis 2:24 that is quoted in Matthew 19. God created this picture of marriage. Jesus quotes from it in verse 5 and 6 and Genesis 2:24 says they are no longer two, but they are one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no man separate. God creates marriage. He makes marriage happen.

What this means is, first of all, we're going to fly through parts of these, but, first of all, marriage is permanent. The Bible teaches this very clearly. This is the whole picture that Jesus is giving to us here in Matthew 19. Only God can make marriage and, as a result, only God can break marriage.

I want to share with you a quote here from a guy named Jay Adams. This is a guy who's written volumes of books on biblical counseling, and this quote just is so potent. Listen to what he said. He said:

If marriage were of human origin, then human beings would have a right to set it aside; but since God instituted marriage, only He has the right to do so. Marriage is an institution which includes individual marriages. It's subject to the rules and regulations set down by God. Individuals may marry, be divorced, and be remarried only if, when, and how He says they may without sinning. The state has been given the task of keeping orderly records, etc.; but it has no right or competence to determine the rules for marriage and for divorce. That prerogative is God's.

I would take it a step deeper. You and I do not have the right or the competence to determine the rules for marriage and for divorce. That prerogative is God's, and this is really the starting point in many ways because the question that confronts us when we come to these passages is: Are we going to submit our lives to this Word? We cannot approach this Word tonight thinking, "I'm going to wait and see what it says and then consider whether or not I obey it." That's not a God-honoring, God-centered way to approach the Word. Are we submitting our lives to His Word? It's the prerogative of God. Only He can make marriage, and only He can break marriage. Therefore, we need to listen to what God says about marriage and divorce.

Marriage is permanent. "What God has joined together, let no man separate." Not only is marriage permanent, but marriage is a covenant. This is the picture from the very beginning in Genesis. It's what we have talked about. God is a covenant-keeping God. I was talking with one lawyer after this morning's service who was reminding me of the differences between a contract and a covenant. A contract can be broken. When it's broken, you go to a higher authority and you say, "This person needs to be held accountable with their contract" and they're held accountable to it and then the contract is broken.

Covenant is different. Covenant cannot be broken. You go to a higher authority and you say, "This person has entered into covenant, and they must keep it." God is a covenant-keeping God. The picture we have talked about is the fact that marriage is a reflection of the most precious covenant – the relationship covenant between Christ and His bride. Christ and His church. Christ and His people. Marriage is a demonstration to the world of Christ's covenant with His people.

You want to see how Christ loves His people? Look how a husband loves his wife. You want to see how His people love Christ? Look at how a wife loves her husband. As a result, divorce slanders the covenant of Christ and His people. It presents to the world a lie about Christ and His people. The reality is, if there comes a day when Christ divorces His people, then it will be okay for a man to divorce his wife or wife to divorce her husband; but until that day comes, and it will not come, then the picture is marriage is a covenant that is to be kept for the sake of the glory of Christ and demonstration of the covenant of Christ to the world around us.

This is why we look at these texts with great humility and great boldness tonight – because the glory of Christ in the world is bound up in this picture of marriage. Therefore we must look at these texts in a divorce-ready culture in light of the eternal significance of the picture of marriage. God created marriage. It is permanent, and it is a covenant.

God Hates Divorce

Second, so how does God respond to divorce? Second truth, God hates divorce. This is the passage that we have not read, but this is literally a quote from Malachi – you might write this down – Malachi 2:16, "[God] *hates divorce*." He created marriage. Divorce is fundamentally at odds with the purpose of God for marriage in creation. As a result, He hates divorce.

Now, what's interesting is Jeremiah 3:8 actually uses the word "divorce" when talking about God and His relationship with His people, unfaithful Israel. So when we hear God saying He hates divorce, well, what does that mean then?

When you break down Malachi 2, I believe it means two primary things. Number one, God hates the causes of divorce. He hates the causes of divorce. Keep following along there. Divorce is always a result of sin. Sin is the cause of divorce. Divorce is always a result of

sin. This is the point of Deuteronomy 24. It's what Jesus is alluding to in Matthew 19. He says, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were" what? - "hard." The reason divorce came into the picture is because your hearts were hard toward God, toward each other. Divorce is always a result of sin. We have talked about this.

Marriage is a uniting of two dreadfully sinful people for life. As a result, there are no perfect marriages. If you are single, and you have an ideal of this perfect, beautiful marriage, it's not going to happen. I have been there. My wife even more so has been there. You talk with Heather you'll get a mouthful on how marriages are not perfect. They're not perfect.

Because sin is involved in the picture of a man and a woman. Every husband in this room, every wife in this room has sin is prone to sin that affects the way we relate to each other. That's why we need the gospel in our marriages. We talked about that, but I want us to think about how that affects divorce and leads to divorce. Sin creates conflict. And it's not just that sin results in divorce, but think about this with me, just camp out here for a minute longer. It is very difficult to walk through a divorce process without sinning, and here's what I mean by that.

Obviously, in most circumstances, this is the picture we have in the Bible, there is a spouse who is often the offending spouse and the offended spouse. Some people say, "Well, this is the guilty spouse and the innocent spouse", but I don't think that those terms square with Scripture because there's no innocent spouse. There's no spouse who has no sin. The picture is, even when an offended spouse is walking through, maybe even divorce under biblical grounds - which we're going to talk about in just a moment - it is extremely difficult for that spouse to not sin in the process of divorce. Our world encourages a sense of bitterness, spirit of hatred or spitefulness begins to take root there and a spouse will say, "But look at what he did to me," or "Look at what she did to me."

And now - don't miss it - now one spouse's sin is justifying another spouse's sin and the snowball effect of sin is growing and growing and growing and God's desire for reconciliation and restoration is being swept out of the picture. I'm not saying it is easy for any spouse in this situation - I'm not saying that at all. I don't believe Scripture is saying it's easy. I don't believe Jesus is saying it's easy not to sin in those situations. Scripture's not saying it's easy, but Scripture is saying to us that we're not alone in those pictures. You have the person of Christ, the presence of Christ and all the divine resources of Christ at your disposal and the picture is we must run from sin at all times and never let one sin justify another sin. Run from sin at all times. Divorce is always a result of sin. Resist sin. Run to Christ. Run to the gospel. Divorce is always a result of sin.

Second, follow along with me here, divorce is almost always sinful. We're going to see in just a moment that there are a couple of grounds under which God allows divorce. So when the Bible says God hates divorce, it does not necessarily mean that in every circumstance the divorce should never happen. We're about to see some possible grounds for divorce in Scripture - and they're extremely narrow grounds - and in those extremely narrow grounds, divorce is not, in and of itself, sinful.

Now, divorce outside of those grounds is inherently sinful. When we go through a divorce that does not fall in line with these extremely narrow grounds, then we are sinning. So divorce is not always, but almost always sinful, with the exception of these narrow grounds that we're going to talk about in just a minute. God hates the causes of divorce.

He hates the sin that leads to divorce, and not just the causes of divorce, God hates the consequences of divorce. We might even keep writing there - divorce negatively affects

physical offspring. This is the context of Malachi 2. You look one verse before Malachi 2:15. Talk about the family unit. We've seen this, how family is the means by which God is raising up children, advancing the gospel through the home and divorce undercuts the picture that God has designed there. God obviously knows what He's talking about, the emotional implications of a child who is no longer living with mommy or daddy is all of a sudden in the middle of discussions about parenting agreements or custody disputes or finds himself oftentimes as a pawn between a mom and a dad in the conflict they're having with each other. Not to mention the financial implications of a one-parent home, the strains that puts not only on the parent, but on children, and the social, spiritual implications.

This is one of those places I want to be extremely careful because there are folks who are divorced and there are children whose families have been divorced and even when we see that God hates the consequences of divorce and how divorce negatively affects physical offspring, this is a biblical picture. At the same time, God does not leave you alone to walk through those effects. He walks with you through those effects. He does not abandon you to walk through those effects alone. He never abandons you. As His people, He does not abandon us. We're going to talk about that later. So hold onto that, please.

If you are married, I urge you at this point not to buy into the myths of divorce ideas that – "I just want to get divorced, so it will be over." It will not be over the Bible says. It will not be over. "Let's just end it" – it goes on – just much, much more complicated.

And don't buy the myth of divorce, "Well, the children will be better in the end." God is saying, "I hate the consequences of divorce." We're going to see, He says, even when unbelieving spouse is in the picture, be married for the sake of your children. Divorce negatively affects physical offspring. The Bible is saying, it'll effect, not just children, but children or parents, grandparents, grandchildren, effects continue. Divorce negatively affects physical offspring, and divorce negatively affects spiritual offspring.

We've talked about this. The effects of divorce and the betrayal of Christ in the world are real. We hinder the advancement of the gospel in the world if we jeopardize the picture of Christ's love for His people in marriage. So, for the sake of people who are headed to a Christless eternity, hear what God is saying about divorce. He hates the causes of divorce and hates the consequences of divorce.

God Regulates Divorce

Now, with those two pictures, God created marriage and, as a result, He hates divorce, we see the third truth: God regulates divorce. Divorce, as we've seen, was not in the original plan of God. In that sense, He never willed divorce, but the picture we have in Deuteronomy 24, in Matthew 19, Mark 10, Luke 16, 1 Corinthians 7 is we've got the Bible acknowledging that divorce is a reality and we see God regulating that reality.

I want to be very careful, even with the way I use that word because I don't want to portray something the Bible is not teaching. By saying God regulates divorce, I'm not saying that the Bible's teaching that God gives suggestions for divorce. These are not suggestions that God is giving. Sometimes people even misconstrue what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 7 when he says, "To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord)." They say, "Well, Paul's just giving his opinion here." No. Paul is differentiating from when he's quoting directly from Jesus and when he's not. When he says, "I say this, not the Lord," this is a picture of him saying, "the Holy Spirit of God, in the Word, is bringing something fresh down the pipe at this point, but it's the Word."

This is important; because, when we look at what we're about to look at, these are not just suggestions for us to consider. This is how we often approach the Word of God, especially when it comes to this issue. Pastors, counselors, lawyers, or whoever it may be, taking license with the Word of God to twist, turn, add to, take away. These are not optional suggestions for us to consider. They are commands in Scripture to be obeyed. God is not just offering us suggestions on how to handle divorce. He is telling us how divorce should be handled and what He does is He gives two grounds, in regulating divorce, two grounds for biblical divorce, for divorce that God allows and what I want us to do is look at them one by one.

The first one is in Matthew 19, Mark 10, and Luke 16. It's specifically mentioned in Matthew 19, Matthew 5:32 also; and it's alluded to in 1 Corinthians 7. Paul even gives these two side-by-side, he gives the first one in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 and the second in 12-15. What Paul is saying here is that there are two different contexts. We've got to get understanding about this from the very beginning. There are two different contexts for these grounds.

First context is divorce between believers, followers of Christ. Paul differentiates in 1 Corinthians 7 what Jesus has said dealt with divorce between believers. What he is saying over here in 1 Corinthians 7:12-15 is divorce between a believer and an unbeliever. So there's two different contexts, two different grounds for divorce. One ground deals with divorce between believers. The other ground deals with divorce between a believer and an unbeliever, and so whether or not both the husband and wife are believers has huge implications for how we approach divorce in those two situations.

So we'll start with the first, Matthew 19, divorce between believers. The picture here is that people are coming and asking Jesus about this whole picture in Deuteronomy 24. And the background is you go back to that passage in Deuteronomy 24, and what it had said is it talked about how, "*If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds*" – listen to this – "*he finds something indecent about her*" (Deut. 24:1). So the debate in first century Judaism was what does that mean? – "something indecent about her." There were two main lines of thought on this.

First line of thought was "something indecent about her" was referring to immodest behavior, most likely sexual immorality. So there were some in first century Judaism who were in the crowd here when Jesus was talking to them that were thinking that divorce should happen in the context of sexual immorality, immodest behavior like that.

Then there was another line of thought that had taken that picture, "something indecent", and then said, "This can apply to anything, not just sexual immorality." If a wife does anything that is displeasing to her husband, then he can divorce her, which is why the question in Matthew 19:3: "*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?*" This had become the dominant line of thought. People thought, "Well, as long as you've got a good reason, then you can make divorce happen." Sound familiar? As long as you've got a good reason, you can make divorce happen. This is the prevailing thought in our world. Find a good reason.

And Jesus addresses these lines of thought; and He says this - this is the main thrust of what He's saying - verse 9: "*I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery*" (Matt. 19:9). So there's one exception mentioned here. The interesting thing is this exception is not mentioned in Mark 10. It's not mentioned in Luke 16, and it's not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7. Some have said, "Well, that means it's really not an exception." But you look at it here and in Matthew 5:32, Jesus is clear on this one, "except for marital unfaithfulness." And so here is the first

ground, one ground for divorce among believers. There's one ground for divorce among believers, and that ground is unrepentant adultery, unrepentant adultery.

Now, I need you to follow with me here. The picture here in Matthew 19 is anyone who divorces his wife except for marital unfaithfulness is what the NIV translates this word as. So if you've got NIV, that's what you've got. If you have just about any other translation, you've got "sexual immorality" or "sexual sin" mentioned there. In fact, the updated NIV has "sexual sin" or "sexual immorality," which the reality is "marital unfaithfulness" is a very poor translation of this word. The word in the original language of the New Testament that Jesus uses here is "porneia." It's a word from which we get words like pornography today. It is specifically dealing with sexual sin. You see it all over Scripture in different types of sexual sin, but it is specifically dealing with fornication with sexual sin. In the context of marriage, what we've got is a picture of sin, sexual sin leads to adultery. This is the picture: sexual sin in the context of marriage. Jesus says there is one ground for divorce between believers, "porneia," sexual sin, sexual immorality.

Now, obviously, Jesus has just taken this prevailing line of thought and narrowed it extremely down, but I want you to think with me. Put yourself in the minds of those who were hearing this. With the Old Testament background, does anybody remember what the penalty for adultery was in the Old Testament? It was death. I just want us to let the gravity of this picture soak in.

Jesus is obviously not teaching that if someone is guilty of adultery that they should die. It's not what He's teaching here in the New Testament, but what He is saying is there is one ground for divorce between believers and it's that which was associated with death in the Old Testament is adultery. I want you to see the seriousness with which Jesus is approaching divorce. Adultery led to death. Here, it leads to divorce.

Why adultery? Why porneia? Why this word? It goes back to the picture Jesus has given us in verse 5, when it quotes from Genesis 2:24, "Man will leave his father and mother, and they will become one flesh." And what does adultery do? Comes in the middle of this one flesh union and brings another into the union and the husband or wife shames and demeans and dishonors their spouse by bringing another into a one-flesh union, and Jesus says this is very serious and it is grounds for potential divorce.

I use the word potential here because, in Matthew 19 - and this is so key - this is not just Jesus kind of aligning Himself with this crew over here. This crew over here, in the first line of thought, looked at Deuteronomy 24, sexual immorality, said if divorce happens then adultery is a no-brainer, it's going to happen. But Jesus is not telling us here we're commanded, when adultery happens, divorce should happen. We're not getting a command here.

Instead, what Jesus is saying is that divorce is possible in this situation. Divorce is possible in this situation, when a husband or wife, for selfish gain, demeans, dishonors, degrades, disgraces a one-flesh union. Divorce is possible. And this is where we begin to see the implications of the gospel for divorce because Jesus is not saying Old Testament, without the gospel, adultery—immediate divorce. Sin is not the end of the story when it comes to the gospel.

The picture here in Matthew 19, is Jesus taking a very redemptive approach to divorce when it comes to adultery. Divorce is possible in this situation, and catch the heart of what Jesus is saying here, "Divorce between believers is never desirable." This is what Jesus is saying

here. Divorce is possible in this situation but it's not mandated in this situation, because divorce between believers is never desirable. We are not looking for reasons to divorce.

Don't miss it. This was the background of these folks in Matthew 19. They were looking at the Law as a check-off list from the outside in and saying, "Where can I find in the Law where it says it's okay for me to divorce?" And Jesus is countering that whole mentality. We've got to be careful to let Jesus counter that mentality in our day, as well.

Husbands, wives not looking for reasons to divorce, looking at the Law of God, the Word of God as a checklist, looking for the loophole. This is not the picture. It misses the heart of what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is saying, even in the worst of circumstances, even in adulterous circumstances, divorce is possible in this situation. It is never desirable, and divorce between believers is never inevitable. It's never inevitable.

Jewish law mandated divorce for adultery. Jesus is challenging that. He is the same radical Savior who would say things in Luke 17 like, "If a brother sins against you seven times in a day, and each time comes back to you and repents," – what does Jesus say? He says, "Forgive him." Forgive him. I am not in any way pretending to know what it's like to be in the shoes of a husband or a wife who has had a spouse commit adultery against them, but this is the picture of the gospel - sin is not the end of the story. I don't believe Jesus is saying it's easy to forgive. I believe what Jesus is saying in Matthew 19, to them then, and to us now, I see He's saying, "I came to forgive you of your sins. I died on a cross to forgive you of your sins, to count you as righteous before God, to show you a love that supersedes your unfaithfulness to Me, and to show you, enable you to love the same way."

This is the gospel and divorce, and we must be very careful not to give up on the gospel when it comes to divorce. Divorce is never inevitable. Think about it. If it were, then that means a believing husband or a believing wife would be in a position where they have absolutely no hope when it comes to fulfilling, obeying God's will for their lives and that is never, ever, ever the case. There's always hope because of the gospel. The gospel radically transforms divorce. It's never inevitable, because we are looking for reconciliation to occur. Reconciliation is always the goal of the gospel. Reconciliation, restoration is always the goal of the gospel. This is what Jesus is after. It's what Paul is after.

Now, the reality is no one of us in this room can control anybody else - and we cannot control our spouse - so there are situations where a spouse, an adulterous spouse continues in sin, is unrepentant in their sin and maybe the offended spouse by the power of the gospel is ready to forgive, wants to forgive but this spouse continues in unrepentant sin. Jesus says it is possible for divorce to happen then in that case, under those grounds. Keep reconciliation the goal, and Scripture addresses – Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5, 1 John tells us how to deal with unrepentant believers who persist in their sin. There's a way, and this is why this is handled in the context of the church; because there's a way that that should be dealt with in the church. Jesus is saying divorce is possible in this situation. It's the first grounds.

Second grounds for divorce deals with divorce between a believer and an unbeliever. Completely different context. One ground for divorce between believers. One ground for divorce between a believer and unbeliever. It's over in 1 Corinthians 7. That ground is unsaved abandonment. Paul is writing in 1 Corinthians 7 to a young church, many new Christians and the reality is many husbands and wives had been married and a wife or a husband comes to faith in Christ, post-marriage and so now you've got a believing spouse, an unbelieving spouse. One of the spouses, a husband or wife, has not come to faith in

Christ and the other one has, so what's the picture here? How do you do that? How do you deal with that?

And what was happening is, in Corinth, people were teaching that it would be better for you, then, to divorce your spouse. If you're a Christian, divorce your spouse. It'd be more spiritual for you to do that and be single. It'd be better for that, and Paul counters that. He says, "No." He says to the believing spouse, the Christian spouse, he says, "Do not divorce your husband or wife, unbelieving husband or wife. Live in peace with them for your sake, for sake of your children, and for the sake of their souls. The soul of your unbelieving spouse. Live with them. Stay in your marriage." But then Paul acknowledges – this is regulating divorce – that there were circumstances where an unbelieving spouse may say, "Listen, my wife or my husband came to faith in Christ. They won't do this or this or this with me. They're praying and studying the Word of God, seeking after holiness; and I can't do it anymore."

And that unbelieving spouse abandons – 1 Corinthians 7:15 – leaves the believing spouse; and what Paul says, what the Bible says is in that circumstance, the believing spouse should let him or her go. 1 Corinthians 7:15, "*If the unbeliever leaves, let him do so.*" In fact, Paul says – not just it's possible in this situation over here, this situation of divorce is preferable. Preferable, in other words, let him go. Do not resist that picture. You're always praying for reconciliation. Just like we talked about it before, divorce is never desirable, not inevitable, but if an unbelieving spouse leaves, then divorce is possible, preferable in that situation. It's not initiated by the believing spouse, instead it's initiated by the unbelieving spouse.

So these are the two grounds that Scripture gives for divorce: divorce between two believers based on unrepentant adultery; divorce between a believer and an unbeliever based on unsaved abandonment. Now, it goes without saying that these are extremely narrow grounds and some people have said that Jesus is being impractical in Matthew 19, surely, He meant there are other grounds, as well. Others believe Paul is being impractical, and that maybe he's talking about when somebody, a spouse, acts like an unbeliever. We can try to twist these things and we can find people who will help us twist them, but this word "porneia" really doesn't open itself up to more than sexual sin, sexual immorality. This picture is very clear in 1 Corinthians 7 about a believer and an unbeliever in light of the context here.

And, obviously, there are things that we would maybe expect or maybe want to also be included in these grounds, things like abuse—physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse; or neglect—physical neglect, sexual neglect, emotional neglect, lack of love, support, encouragement. All of these things, Scripture addresses, Scripture addresses all of these things very seriously, but the Scripture addresses them in the context of marriage and I want to emphasize that Scripture does address them very seriously. I, in no way want to give the idea that Scripture is saying abuse, in particular, is not a big deal. It's a very big deal, and no wife or husband or child should live in a home where they're in harm's way because of an abusive husband or wife - no question about that. And there are ways Scripture says these things need to be dealt with and they need to be dealt with extremely seriously in the context of the church, but they are not included in this biblical grounds for divorce. The picture we have here, unrepentant adultery and unsaved abandonment.

Now, flowing from that is the picture we have in these passages that we've read in addition to, especially Mark 10:10-12 - "anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery." Words like that. Talking about remarriage, "If she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband." The picture of remarriage comes in and I want to be careful here, because we don't obviously have time tonight to dive into an exhaustive study of this

picture, but suffice to say at this point. And I even hesitate to say this because I'll be honest there are men that I respect greatly, teachers of the Word, students of the Word that I respect greatly that would not even go this far, but I believe the implication of what we see here in Matthew 19, Matthew 5, Mark 10, 1 Corinthians 7 is that remarriage is biblically permissible only after biblical grounds for divorce.

So the picture we've got is two extremely narrow grounds for divorce. Divorce outside of those grounds is sinful and leads to further sin and is equated with adultery, which we've obviously seen the seriousness of. The reason this is not clear in our day is because – it's the things we've talked about - there's such a lack of teaching on divorce in Scripture. As a result, there's such a web when it comes to divorce in our culture that is not informed by the Word, but the Bible is saying that if we're divorced or divorce for grounds outside of what Scripture has given us, then that is sin and remarriage at that point is also sin. It's equated with adultery here.

Only if you had biblical grounds for divorce, if you were the non-adulterous spouse who your spouse was persistent in unrepentant adultery, divorce happened then biblical remarriage is a possibility. And the picture for a believing spouse who has been deserted, abandoned by an unbelieving spouse, biblical remarriage is a possibility.

Now, some of you are thinking, "I'm remarried after divorce, and my divorce was not on biblical grounds. Does that mean that I am in adultery?" And I want you hold onto that question for just a moment. Hold onto it for just a moment, because I want you to see this final truth.

God Redeems Divorce

God created marriage. God hates divorce. He regulates divorce. Fourth truth, God redeems divorce. If you are divorced, I want to speak to you especially from these passages. I can only imagine that there are fresh wounds in your life that have been uncovered. I pray, though, that the truths that we have seen also bring fresh healing to those wounds. And you say, "How does that – how does this bring healing? The seriousness with which Scripture approaches divorce, it's happened, how does that bring healing to me?"

Here's how it brings healing. These words are tough, because Christ's devotion to His bride is very serious. These words are tough, because Christ's covenant with His people is unbreakable and this is where the healing comes. Because the reality is that if divorce is in your past, if there is a picture, especially, of unbiblical divorce, I want to remind you that Christ is still your husband and will always be your husband. This is the picture of what we're seeing here in Scripture – a God who does not pick us up where we wish we were, where we'd like to be, where we should've been. He picks you up right where you are, and your eternal husband is always forgiving. Divorce is not the great sin. It's not the unforgivable sin. It's not the unpardonable sin. This is the gospel and divorce.

Divorce, even sinful divorce is well within the reach of God's grace. I know that there's a danger, even in mentioning this. There's a danger that there might be a husband or wife and as soon as I say that, might start to think, "Well, I don't have biblical grounds for divorce, but I'm going to divorce anyway because I know that God will forgive me." That misses the whole point of the gospel and what it means to be a follower of Christ, but I'm going to take the risk of going there because I want every divorced man or divorced woman to hear loud and clear that you have an eternal husband who is great, He is merciful, He is gracious, He is strength and He's sustenance in His everything. He is provision for you. He is provision for your children. Your eternal husband is always forgiving and, praise God, your eternal husband is always faithful.

He's always faithful! He will never commit adultery against you. He will never abandon you. No matter what happens in this world, Jesus will never, never, never forsake His bride. He will never forsake His bride. He will never abandon you. He will never abuse you. He will always love you. He will always take you back when you wander. He will always be patient with you. He will always care for you, provide for you, protect you and, praise God, He will be always delight in you. Whether you've been divorced one time or fifty times, you are part of the bride of Christ. You have an eternal husband. God redeems divorce. This is the gospel and divorce; good news and divorce.

The Gospel and Divorce...

So, based on that, how does this Word – how does this Word apply to our lives? What is the takeaway, and the danger here – the danger here is just about every circumstance is different and there's so many different factors amidst this tangled web. If we were starting from a clean slate, talking about marriage in our culture, it would obviously be a lot easier. There are pictures that are scattered throughout when it comes to divorce and people who were saved before or after divorce or this picture or that picture. So I want to be even cautious here not to give a check off list for how this should look. That's the whole thing Jesus was countering, but I do believe that these Scriptures have implications for our lives in different ways.

If You are Single...

First, if you are single, what is the takeaway from this tonight for you as a single? Takeaway is maximize your singleness to advance the gospel. Singleness is a God-given gift. We've talked about this in 1 Corinthians 7 and God has given you freedom from the troubles of marriage that we have talked about; and He says to singles, "Maximize your singleness to advance the gospel."

If You Are Married...

If you are married, the takeaway is love your spouse in a way that portrays the gospel. Husbands, let tonight be further resolve in your heart, in your life to lay down everything in sacrificial love for your wife. That's the takeaway. And wives, to love your husband as the church loves Christ. This is the picture, the takeaway.

If You Are Considering Divorce...

Along those lines, this also deals with those who are married, but I want to put an extra in here. If you're married and considering divorce, if you're considering divorce, I believe the Word is encouraging you to remember the preciousness of the gospel and the power of the gospel.

Here's what I mean by that. Preciousness and power – first, if you're considering divorce, I encourage you, I urge you to consider whether or not there are biblical grounds for divorce. Not to take the world's approach to divorce, but to take Christ's redemptive approach to divorce. Are there biblical grounds for divorce based on what we've looked at? And if there are not, I in no way want to minimize the conflict that is there, the depth of hurt, pain that is there, but I want to remind you of the preciousness and the power of the gospel. The gospel is good and the gospel never leaves us hopeless and the gospel can change any heart, change any situation. This is the beauty of the glory of the gospel, and it is precious. This is not just about what is going on here between you and your wife or you and your husband. It's about what's going on before the world about what the gospel looks like.

And so remember the preciousness and the power of the gospel and run from sin. Run to Christ when it comes to contemplation of divorce. If you're in that situation, and there are biblical grounds for divorce, then I encourage you to keep the hope of the gospel front, center in your heart as you walk through this process. I encourage you to pray for the gospel to empower you to have the attitude of Christ, the presence and the resources of Christ at your disposal at all times to make those a reality. To pray that God, by His gospel, would change the heart of an unrepentant spouse. Remember the preciousness of the gospel and the power of the gospel.

If You Are Divorced for a Biblical Reason...

If you are divorced for a biblical reason, then I want to encourage you, based on the Word of God, to rest in the gospel, in your singleness, or, possibly, in a future marriage. If you divorced for biblical grounds, you were the non-adulterous spouse in the picture of unrepentant adultery, or you were a believing spouse and abandoned by an unbelieving spouse, I want to encourage you that God has not left you alone. He's entrusted you at this moment with a singleness to be used for His glory and I want to urge you, by the power of the gospel, to rejoice in that singleness as long as He entrusts it to you; and to rejoice in future marriage that He may entrust to you to portray the power of the gospel through that.

If You Are Divorced for an Unbiblical Reason and Single...

Last two, if you are divorced for an unbiblical reason and single, I believe Scripture encourages you to repent and, by that, I mean repent to God and to your former spouse, if you have not done this, for sinfulness involved in that picture of divorce. Repent to God and to your former spouse, and rely on the gospel to glorify Christ as you stay single.

Again, I want to be very careful here. There are so many different circumstances of people who did come to faith in Christ after divorce or people who are repenting and want to be reconciled with husbands or wives. I'm not saying that any of this picture is one size fits all, but the picture we've got in 1 Corinthians 7, based on an unbiblical divorce, is to rely on the gospel to glorify Christ in your singleness. The world will say, "Well, how can the Bible say that? You're going to miss out on so much for the next 10 or 20 or 30 or 40 years." God, give us grace to say back to the world, "I have an eternal husband that is waiting for me that makes 10 or 20 or 30 or 40 years pale in comparison to billions upon billions upon billions of years with a husband who is always good." This is the picture that enables us to rejoice in singleness.

If You Are Divorced for an Unbiblical Reason and Married...

Lastly, if you are divorced for an unbiblical reason and married, and this is where we come back to that question earlier, meaning if you're divorced for an unbiblical reason and you have remarried, the Word encourages you to repent. Again, if you've not turned to God and repented in your relationship with your former spouse, then repent and reflect the gospel in your current marriage. The Bible does not say that, in your current marriage, you need to break another marriage covenant. Instead, magnify Christ and the marriage you have now. These are heavy truths.

So what I'd like us to do is take at least a few moments together, and I hope you'll take these moments even beyond this time; but a few moments together to let these truths soak in.

God, I pray, has shown us His Word and now we respond to His Word. I want to give you time to commune with God in different ways. I want to invite you, if you are a married couple who's here, to commune with God together and to pray through the picture that

we've seen here. I want to invite those who may have divorce in their past to let God, by the power of the gospel, to bring maybe fresh healing in your heart and fresh surrender to whatever He has for your life by His infinite wisdom. Whether that's sitting in your seat or praying with someone else around, I want us to have a time where we go to God, where we take these gospel truths and run to Christ. So I'm going to pray for us and I want the faithfulness of Christ to minister to all of us in the different circumstances we have and I want to invite you to run to Christ with whatever circumstance you find yourself in.

Father, we thank you for the gospel and the way the gospel transforms marriage, transforms family, and, specifically tonight, transforms divorce. God, we praise you for your faithfulness to us. Praise you for never abandoning us. God, we pray that your gospel would bring great healing and great hope, great strength and great sustenance. We give these moments to you as we reflect on your faithfulness to us, as we reflect on these words to us. God, we pray that you would give us grace to commune with you, to hear from you, to pour our hearts out before you, and to walk with you by the power of your gospel, to turn off the words of the world, and to meditate on your Word to us.

You feel free to pray alone, pray together just to kneel before God and spend some time communing with Him. I urge you to run to Christ. Run to Christ.

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