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Divorce and Remarriage

Matthew 5:31-32

Prayer: *Father God, we do again thank you for your grace and for your goodness and for how great you are. And Father, we just thank you for the gift of coming together in corporate worship. We thank you for the gift of your word. Once again we are opening up that word and we're praying for the presence of your Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth, again give us the ability to understand, to actually hear what your Spirit is saying and to again make it a permanent part of our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, by now I think we are getting used to Jesus's method of deconstructing the Pharisees when it comes to understanding how to work your relationship with God. What I talked about many, many times before is that the Pharisees were really a spiritual compliance company and they had convinced the people that God was too big, that he was too complicated, that he was too scary to approach individually and that it was far better to simply knuckle down and follow all of the rules that they had enacted, that they laid out as necessary in order to please God. And the rules, they

governed only the externals and so it was possible to have what looked like an extreme form of godliness and holiness when God knew that it was strictly for show. In fact Jesus said in Matthew 23: *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every impurity."* Jesus hated the Pharisees' game, and he took great pains to refute it and contradict it whenever he encountered it.

And so what we have been doing as we're looking at the Sermon on the Mount, we are systematically working our way through some of those refutations. See, the good news of the gospel is that we are made right not by playing the Pharisees' game but through faith in Jesus Christ and his righteousness which he laid down for us on the cross. Now the Pharisees said follow our rules and you can make yourself good enough for God. Jesus in essence said if obedience to rules is what makes you acceptable to God, then understand those rules demand of you absolute perfection. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus practically demonstrates how the Pharisees' game simply will not work. Jesus does that by expanding the law. I've said it over and over again, what he does is like a smart phone or a tablet, he takes the law and he puts his finger on it and he opens it up and as he opens it up, it goes from being doable and manageable as the Pharisees had fashioned it to absolutely

impossible. And that's what we've been looking at these last few weeks. We saw that the Pharisees declared that it was murder itself that was liable to judgment. Jesus puts his finger on it, he expands that notion, he expands the law and he says and an angry thought, a scornful word is just as liable to the judgment. The Pharisees declared that the act of adultery was what was forbidden. Jesus does the same thing, he looks at adultery and he expands it and he says even looking lustfully at a woman is an act of adultery. So every time the Pharisees presented their method of managing God, Jesus took that method and he just exploded it, and he did it by repeating over and over the phrase, "You have heard it said," that's how they described it, that was the Pharisees' way and then he would answer, "But I say." And that's what we've been looking at for these last few weeks.

Our text this morning expands on Jesus's response to the Pharisees' particular teaching on divorce and remarriage. It's in *Matthew 5:31-32*. It starts out: "*It was also said*" -- and that again, this is the way the Pharisees presented their views -- "*It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you*" -- this is Jesus's response to that -- "*But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*" See, Jesus is

responding here to a classical Pharisee management technique, and as usual, they had virtually everything backwards. What mattered little to them mattered a great deal to Jesus. What mattered a great deal to Christ mattered to them very, very little. And Jesus summed up their approach by saying in *Matthew 23*: "*You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!*" Well, the "gnat" in this instance was this idea of "the certificate of divorce." You see, the Pharisees had taken their teaching from *Deuteronomy 24* in which Moses says this, this is *Deuteronomy 24:1-4*. It says: "*When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then 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 departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate he divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.*"

Now, any reasonable person who is looking at that passage would conclude from that passage that the main idea that Moses was

presenting was that of extramarital defilement. What Moses is saying is that a wife being put out with a certificate of divorce becomes defiled by her second marriage. So much so that if her second husband divorces her or if he dies, she is not to return to her former husband because she's now been defiled by that second marriage. Well, somehow or other the Pharisees took that and they managed to twist the discussion into what really mattered to them, and what mattered to them was not the defilement of remarriage, it was this idea of a certificate. You need some certificate in order to get divorced. And furthermore, the Pharisees expand on the idea of the wife being put out for some indecency found in her. And we know that that couldn't have been the sin of adultery because that was already punishable by death, so we know that it had to be some kind of serious character flaw, something that had to be considered an indecency, but the Pharisees instead chose to linger on the idea of her no longer finding favor in her husband's eyes. So they took that little gnat, as it were, they took that little part and they proceeded to have a field day with their understanding of what that means, labeling as cause for divorce trivialities such as burning dinner, talking too much or too loudly or putting too much salt on the meat. These are rules that they had arrived stemming from doing something to not find favor in her husband's eyes. This is why Jesus held them in such scorn. See, they presumed to be speaking for God when they were really saying things that God

detested. And they trivialized the fact that God hated divorce by turning it into something that really was only a matter of getting a certificate. In fact at one point they tested Jesus with their understanding, asking him in *Matthew 19*, they said this, they said: *"Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"* And their emphasis is on the word "any" because they've already by this time reduced divorce to this simple matter of legality and certificates. And so Jesus responds in *Matthew 19:4* by saying this, he says: *"Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."*

See, the Pharisees thought they had this whole idea of divorce pinned down. And basically they were saying is it not true as long as you get a certificate you can get divorce for any cause, and Jesus goes back, he goes back to the original creation story to reiterate that God's design for marriage is permanent. And they respond like classic Pharisees and they're pointing to the one requirement that they see that makes divorce legitimate and you know what it is? It's the certificate. In verse 7 they said to him, *"Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?"* Well, once again they have

everything perfectly backwards. You see, the certificate of divorce was a protection that God had given to wives who were often victims of the very hardness of heart that Jesus is speaking of. John Maxwell says this: "The Hebrew divorce was intended to protect the wife. In ancient civilization, women were second-class citizens. In the heathen cultures around Israel, women were bought, sold, and traded like animals. The bill of divorcement mentioned here actually protected the woman and released her from further domestic obligations in the man's house. She was awarded financial protection. Custom required the husband who divorced his wife to return her dowry and give her a portion of his own estate equal to that dowry. She left the marriage with twice the lands, property, or money that she brought into the marriage."

So the certificate itself is a huge improvement over what existed beforehand which was simply announcing that the marriage was over and throwing the woman out of your house. This certificate required careful deliberation and it had to be registered as an official document in what was the equivalent of their courts. Still Jesus identified the entire process as a concession to sinful hardheartedness. He says in *Matthew 19:8*: *He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and*

marries another, commits adultery." It's this final comment that Jesus makes in verse 9 as well as in our text this morning that two different schools of thought concerning divorce and remarriage hang on. Jesus made four statements on divorce; two of those statements have qualifiers and two of them don't. Let me just give you the two that don't. This is *Luke 16:18*. Jesus says: *"Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery."* No qualifiers there. In *Mark 10:11*, it says: *And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."* Again there's no qualifier there as well. So neither of these verses have qualifiers but the other two do. *Matthew 19:8* says: *He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."* Now the only difference in the statement Jesus makes in Matthew and those in Luke and Mark is this phrase that has come to be known as "the exception clause." Our text this morning states it just as clearly. This is *Matthew 5:32*, Jesus's words: *"But I tell you, everyone who divorces his wife, except in a case of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."*

Now standard Protestant orthodoxy has always allowed for three different legitimate ways for a marriage to end. They've been referred to as the three D's. It is death, defilement, and desertion. I mean the first one, death, is pretty self-explanatory and it's pretty obvious and no one disputes the facts that widows and widowers are free to remarry and the scripture actually makes it clear. In *1 Corinthians 7:39* it says: *A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.* That's not a problem. It's the other two D's that people disagree on. Defilement is simply a way of describing what adultery does to the covenant of marriage. And we're going to spend the bulk of our time looking at that, but first I want to describe the other "D" which is desertion. I want to describe it to explain the scriptural basis for it being a legitimate means of ending a marriage.

This is from *1 Corinthians 7:10-17*. This is Paul's words, he says: *To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): The wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she*

consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.

Okay. So God says, first of all, that no marriage should be ended at the instigation of the believing spouse, and of course the assumption here is that these partners came to Christ somehow or some way subsequent to their being married, because God is unequivocal that certainly no Christian should ever marry a non-Christian, and he says that in 2 Corinthians 6:14. He says: *Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?* God's speaking wisdom here. There is no heartache like being constantly

challenged to choose between the Lord of your life and your spouse. I mean, I've seen numerous relationships where the unbelieving spouse deeply resents the faith of the believing spouse and sees their faith commitment as a profound threat within their own status in the marriage. The image God uses of a believer and an unbeliever marrying is two different animals that are yoked together for a common task. And so just imagine you have an ox yoked with a sheep. You know, one is built to plow and the other is built to graze, and put them together, they'll do neither. I mean, what happens when a spouse begins resenting the time that you spend going to church? And when they think the idea of tithing is absolutely crazy? When decisions have to be made about what kind of an education the kids are going to receive? Furthermore, God says in *1 Corinthians 1:18*: *The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is God's power to us who are being saved.* Try living your life day in and day out with someone who thinks the most important part of your life is utter foolishness. Such is the life of those who are unequally yoked. God says if you are in such a situation, if you have found Christ but your spouse has not, he says to remain, to remain upright and struggle and seek God's mercy to save your spouse. Paul takes great pains to describe how even half of an unequally yoked marriage can be a blessing to the unbelieving spouse and certainly to the children, and if, as verse 11 points out, marriage becomes

unbearable and it's ended by the believing spouse, well then the only options are reconciliation with no subsequent remarriage until all chance of reconciliation is removed by the death of that spouse. However, the scripture says: But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. Now most Protestants believe that in these circumstances when the unbelieving spouse has essentially deserted the believing spouse, then after enough time has passed and he or she perhaps has remarried, then the believing spouse is free to marry. We'll get back to this, but understand this is the second of the three legitimizing reasons put forth for divorce. We have first, we have death, which is obvious; we have desertion but only by the unbelieving spouse; and finally we have defilement. Defilement happens when a spouse commits adultery. One of the reasons why God speaks of such extreme measures when he speaks about adultery is because adultery is an extremely serious sin. You know, we all happen to live in a culture that winks and laughs at adultery. But understand, Jesus introduces this concept of the idea of marriage being defiled by adultery after first discussing what we talked about in the last few weeks, adultery itself. And this is what he says in the verses right before this discussion about adultery and marriage, he says this *Matthew 5:27*: "*You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery. But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed*

adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."

Jesus is describing extraordinarily serious consequences for extraordinarily serious sins. And to understand why the breaking of the covenant of marriage through adultery is so serious, you have to understand that marriage itself goes back to the original creation order that God established all the way back in the Garden of Eden. When Jesus was confronted by a group of incredulous Pharisees, he made this statement, this is *Matthew 19*. It says: *Some Pharisees approached Him to test Him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife on any grounds?" "Haven't you read," He replied, "that He who created them in the beginning made them male and female." And he also said: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, man must not separate."* Now the apostle Paul picks up on that. He reads the very same statement in *Ephesians 5:31*, he says: *"For this reason a*

man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." But then he goes on to say this in verse 32. He says: *This is a great mystery. But I speak concerning Christ and the church.* Now Paul says in essence what's being discussed here about marriage is mystery. *Ephesians 5:32* says: *This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.*

We're getting a hint here about what really matters to God in marriage. And what God is saying is that your marriage is an expression of the love of Christ for his church. You know, every single one of us has a need to express something and God understands that and marriage is the place where that takes place. You can tell that people have a need to express themselves by just looking at bumper stickers. Everybody's got to say something in a bumper sticker and look at tattoos, tattoos are just a bumper sticker that you take with you everywhere you go. I mean, the day you marry is the day that both of you start laying down the spiritual ink of a tattoo, in a sense, expressing Christ's love for the church. In a sense it's a spiritual tattoo and it's the only tattoo that really matters, because it carries with you and your spouse's personal expression of what Jesus did when he died for you. *Ephesians 5:25* says: *Husbands, love your wives, just as*

Christ loved the church and gave himself for her. *Ephesians* 5:22-23 says: *Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. See, this is the mystery part, and this is what matters much to God but it is often overlooked. In a sense what God is saying is marriage was designed by God to paint a portrait in the spirit world of the love that Christ has for his church. It is your spiritual tattoo, if you will, that you and your wife, you and your spouse are creating. And it's the most important tattoo or portrait that you will ever compose. You see, every single day of your married lives by your lives themselves you paint and repaint a portrait of how much Christ loved his church. And we paint that portrait largely for a world we've never seen, for a world we don't really know but a world that has far more eternal reality than this world that we're in right now. God says we are surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses who live in that world. And in a sense they're the ones that we're painting it for. And we paint it by how we as husbands and wives love and respect each other. Well, divorce takes the painting right off the easel. If it's a tattoo, it puts a great big X through the tattoo. See, it brings an end to the creative struggles to love and declares that the portrait itself has failed. I mean it's no wonder it says in *Malachi 2:16* for the LORD God of Israel says that he hates divorce.*

Our text this morning deals with the mitigating circumstances that would allow for something God hates to go forward. Again, *Matthew 5:32*: "But I tell you, everyone who divorces his wife, except in a case of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." I believe God has carved out a very limited area where a covenant has been shattered by adultery that allows for divorce and remarriage. I say this with some hesitation because there are far better men than me who are far more gifted in biblical knowledge who don't see it that way. I see Jesus describing an exception to the rule for divorce and remarriage. Others look at the same passage and they see it not an exception at all but a simple statement of fact, a statement of the obvious. Let me put it the way they see it by describing it with a different sin. You know, if you were under terrible circumstances, let's say you lost all of your food, all of your clothing, and all of your shelter, you might have those terrible circumstances turn you into a thief unless of course you were a thief to start with. Well, some others see this as that's what Jesus is saying here. Everyone who divorces his wife except in cases of sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery. What they see is that in this circumstance, divorce turns a wife into an adulterer with the exception of divorce for sexual immorality in which case she's already there in the first place. They believe there are no exceptions that can end a marriage other than death,

and that includes the exception for desertion as well.

And again, let me briefly argue their case. Paul says this in *1 Corinthians 7:15*. He says: *But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such case the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.* Well, they understand Paul to be saying that stating you are no longer enslaved to the marriage itself does not necessarily grant you the freedom to remarry. This is the position of men like John Piper and others that I have a great deal of respect for and I only bring them out as a matter of giving you full disclosure. Now, they have an answer to couples who have found themselves convicted of remarriages that they feel are sinful. The answer is to acknowledge that sin, to recognize that God's mercy extends to all sin and trust that God's mercy will heal their present marriage. This is the way Piper puts it. He said: "What then would Jesus expect from one of his followers who has sinned and is divorced and remarried? He would expect us to acknowledge that the choice to remarry and the act of entering a second marriage was sin and to confess it as such and seek forgiveness. He would also expect that we would not separate from our present spouse. A marriage that was entered sinfully can be consecrated to God, purified from sin, and become a means of grace. It remains less than ideal, but it is not a curse. It may become a great blessing."

Now understand, this is not the position that I take. I mean, I believe that desertion and defilement are legitimate means of ending a marriage and also provide a legitimate excuse for remarriage. And I want you to understand, mine is not some new modernistic approach to marriage and divorce. In fact, the position that I hold is the very same one that the Westminster Confession of Faith holds which was written in 1646. In Chapter 24, Section 5, it says this: "Adultery or fornication, committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract. In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce, and after the divorce to marry another, as if the offending party were dead." I state the Westminster position not in any way suggesting that it's on a par with scripture but simply to point out that good men and women have been wrestling with the scripture's teaching on divorce and remarriage for literally hundreds -- actually thousands of years.

My take away position on this is very simple. We all know that God hates divorce. We know that it takes the portrait of the mystery of the love of Christ for his church off the easel and it declares it a failure. But we also know that what we've been talking about for the last few weeks is this big picture that the Sermon on the Mount gives us about trying to make God manageable. The Pharisees

excelled at trying to put God in a box where he had all these rules that governed your external behavior. Just do what you're told and somehow you can manage God and still keep him at bay. Well, the entire issue of marriage and divorce is far more complex and difficult to yield to these simple formulas like the Pharisees advocated, and God expects each of us individually to wrestle this out.

The Old Testament book of Ezra describes God's people wrestling with some of the same issues that we wrestle with with regard to divorce but in a very different context. Listen to what happened in this instance. This is Ezra 10. It says: *While Ezra prayed and confessed, weeping and falling face down before the house of God, an extremely large assembly of Israelite men, women and children gathered around him. The people also wept bitterly. Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, an Elamite, responded to Ezra: "We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the surrounding peoples, but there is still hope for Israel in spite of this. Let us therefore make a covenant before our God to send away all the foreign wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the command of our God. Let it be done according to the law. Get up, for this matter is your responsibility, and we support you. Be strong and take action!"* Now, you want to talk about being on the horns of a dilemma. I

mean we know Malachi clearly states that God hates divorce, and yet here in the book of Ezra, the Israelites are acknowledging their sin in marrying foreign women in the first place and they're struggling with the idea of divorcing them. I mean they're in a lose-lose situation. And the book ends with this long list of individuals who after meeting with the Council confessed to their sinful marriages and pledged to put their wives away. And the book never tells us whether or not God is pleased or displeased with what they did. It just simply states it as an historical fact. In verse 16 it says: *The exiles did what had been proposed. Ezra the priest selected men who were family leaders, all identified by name, to represent their ancestral houses. They convened on the first day of the tenth month to investigate the matter, and by the first day of the first month they had dealt with all the men who had married foreign women.*

Now, what that's saying here, what we know by looking at this is that the Council that convened spent a great deal of time individually interviewing every single person to determine if a divorce was proper in that particular instance. We don't know anything more but we know that -- we can assume that some of those decisions had to be gut wrenching. And whether they were right or wrong, literally only God knows, 'cause it doesn't say. And so we wonder -- at least I wonder why so much surrounding the issue of

marriage and divorce lies shrouded in this fog of uncertainty, and I wonder if that too sometimes is by design. See, when we pull back to the ten thousand foot level and look at what Jesus is saying here in the Sermon on the Mount, we see that he is despising how the Pharisees took every single aspect of a person's intimate relationship with God and just tried to reduce it to a series of rules, regulations, certificates, all of these things, that's how you manage God. By the time Jesus is clashing with the Pharisees, they had reduced divorce down to one simple procedure. You just got to get a certificate and then you're good to go. Jesus blows that situation right out of the water, and we are still 2,000 years later trying to discern exactly what he meant when he said: *"And I say to you: Whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."*

Just to boil this down, my specific answer to someone asking me if there's an exception for remarriage based on an unbelieving spouse's desertion or on the defilement of adultery is that I would say yes. That is my conviction. But I would also say this: We are not the Pharisees. We can't reduce God to a series of statements and rules and regulations where one size fits all. You see, the bottom line is this, each and every one of us has an obligation to come before God, to seek his will, to seek the counsel of other brothers and sisters as well, but each one of us

is individually responsible for our own conviction about this matter. Now I'm sure there are some who will remain fully convinced that after divorce God has precluded completely remarriage. And there are some who will be fully convinced that remarriage is allowed. And I know for a fact that there are better men than me on both sides of this issue. But there's another principle at work whenever we come upon those parts of scripture that don't yield those specific kind of answers, and the principle is found in *Romans 14:5* and *verse 22*. The principle says: *Each one must be fully convinced in his own mind.* *Verse 22* says: *Do you have a conviction? Keep it to yourselves before God. The man who does not condemn himself by what he approves is blessed.* See, what God is saying here is that there is a God-honoring way to approach circumstances that are not crystally clear in the scripture; and the principle that matters most is a desire to be open, transparent, and willing to hear what God the Holy Spirit is speaking to each and every one of us who come before him sincerely desiring his will and not their own. The fact is every single rule that you find in scripture can be looked on as a specific rule and not a guideline, and if you look at that as a rule, then it can be manipulated. I mean, you take Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians that if the unbelieving spouse desires to leave, so be it. I can see somebody wanting to work the rules. They want to work the rules so they treat their unbelieving spouse so poorly that they

literally drive them out the door and then they claim that they're following the letter of the law because after all, the unbelieving spouse has left, now they're free to remarry. As if God couldn't see precisely what's going on? That's exactly the kind of pharisaical mindset that Jesus hated. That's why he says in *Matthew 15:8*: "*These people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. They worship Me in vain, teaching as doctrines the commands of men.*" You see, what Jesus is looking for from us is a commitment of the heart, to seek his will in all things including divorce and remarriage.

To reiterate, I mean, I believe there are existing circumstances that allow for divorce and remarriage. There's death, there is desertion, and there is defilement. That's just my opinion, and I'm a sinful man just like all of us. And I've said better men than me disagree. So if you've been divorced, if you've been divorced and remarried, what God expects of you is a commitment to prayerfully come before Him to seek his will for your future. He is looking for you to become fully convinced in your own mind as to what the Holy Spirit's desire for you is. I can tell you what God is not looking for as well. What he is not looking for is someone who understands how to work the system as if it's a set of rules that he or she can work to their advantage. In the areas of divorce and remarriage, God wants your heart firmly committed to

seeking out his will regardless the consequences.

And finally, I need to point out that the present day firestorm that we find ourselves in with regard to same-sex marriage has uncovered a profound weakness in many evangelical churches. Now I have on more than one occasion heard people accuse the church of being highly exercised about same-sex marriage while not at all concerned about remarriage and divorce. There's a word for that and the word is "hypocrisy," and the world is only too happy to point that out. Let me conclude today with a statement by Kevin DeYoung who has written wisely about both. This is what he says: "Having said all that, it is undoubtedly the case that many evangelicals have been negligent in dealing with illegitimate divorce and remarriage. Pastors have not preached on the issue for fear of offending scores of their members. Elder boards have not practiced church discipline on those who sin in this area because, well, they don't practice discipline for much of anything. Counselors, friends, and small groups have not gotten involved early enough to make a difference in pre-divorce situations. Christian attorneys have not thought enough about their responsibility in encouraging marital reconciliation. Church leaders have not helped their people understand God's teaching about the sanctity of marriage, and we have not helped those already wrongly remarried to experience forgiveness for their past

mistakes." And finally he says: "So yes, there are plank-eyed Christians among us. The evangelical church, in many places, gave up and caved in on divorce and remarriage. But the remedy to this negligence is not more negligence. The slow, painful cure is more biblical exposition, more active pastoral care, more faithful use of discipline, more word-saturated counseling, and more prayer -- for illegitimate divorce, for same-sex behavior, and for all the other sins that are more easily condoned than confronted." Let's pray.

Father God, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your wisdom, and I would pray that we would be able in a situation like this to ascend to the ten thousand foot level and just say what is it that you're trying to teach us here, Lord, what are you trying to get us to understand, and what comes out of this more than anything is God's desire to own our hearts, not our technical skill at working the rules but our heart's desire to do his will. Give us the ability in any situation including remarriage and divorce so that we would have the desire first and foremost to please you. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.