



## **The Original Design for Marriage**

Matthew 5:31-32

GraceLife: July 2, 2006

© 2006 by Don Green. All rights reserved.

Visitors, we are glad to have you with us. My name is Don Green. For those of you who don't know me, I co-pastor this group with Phil Johnson. We alternate months in the preaching cycle. Over the past several months in general, I have been preaching through the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew chapter 5 and that's where we are going back to today if you want to start turning there.

A couple of weeks ago, I filled in for Phil and I preached on the topic of joy from Psalm 100. Now I have to tell you that there is a certain art to choosing what you are going to speak on. There is a certain plan that you have to follow and you have to take a number of things into account as you do so. You may not realize this, you think it's just you pick up a passage on Saturday night and decide – it doesn't work that way. I try to think at least a few weeks ahead and it had been my intention after preaching on Psalm 100 to go back to the topic of joy and preach on that, because there are more things that I want to say on it and I think it will be helpful when I finally get around to it.

But I had a problem. I had a serious problem as I contemplated that. The sequence of that meant that I would turn to this passage in Matthew chapter 5, which is on divorce and remarriage. I would be preaching on that in the middle of the month. Well, it so happens that July 16 is a Sunday, and July 16 is my anniversary with my lovely wife, Nancy. Can you imagine how much trouble I would get into if I preached on divorce on the exact day of my anniversary? I didn't want to fight that battle. And so if you came looking for joy, your joy will have to be subservient to mine as I preach on marriage and divorce this week and next week, and then we will see what happens on my anniversary. It would probably be strategic for me to preach on the heights of joy on July 16 and I just may do that – we'll see how that works out (laughter). So that's where we are going today and that's why we are here.

We are in Matthew chapter 5, picking up where we left off the last time I preached on the Sermon on the Mount – preaching from Matthew 5:31-32, on the whole issue of marriage and divorce. As I was preparing for this message, I found myself in great sympathy with the words of Kent Hughes, pastor in Wheaton, Illinois, who said this:

*The mere mention of the word 'divorce' is painful to some. Many have been deeply wounded by broken marriages and a discussion of the subject of divorce brings up memories and feelings that they would like to forget. For these reasons, preachers find little joy in preaching on the subject. But since Jesus brought it up*

*right in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest sermon ever preached, He obviously thinks that it is an important subject, one that we dare not ignore. To see this matter through Jesus' eyes is good for us as individuals, good for the church, and good for society.*

One of the benefits of verse-by-verse expositional preaching is that it forces you to deal with topics that you might otherwise choose to ignore. I would not choose to preach on marriage and divorce today, apart from the way that I opened this message. Divorce is a difficult topic. There are many interpretations that you have to kind of wade your way through and a number of difficulties that attend the task. And so it would be just as easy to ignore it, but as you go through systematically what the scriptures have to say, you find yourself face-to-face with the word of God and with the responsibility to acknowledge it and respond to it and, if you are the preacher, to preach it.

Now, before I go any further with that, I want to say this: GraceLife is large enough that we have quite a cross-section here in this room and on an ongoing basis. We have plenty of single people, we have many newly married couples, some of which can be found in the baby corner back there to my left which we are thankful for. I know I speak for Phil and Darlene on this as well. It's wonderful to have all of you young couples here, bringing your little ones in to GraceLife. That's a welcome thing in our group, and we're just so thankful that you are committed to your children and committed to getting here with all the effort that takes on Sunday morning. Those little ones are welcome here and always will be.

But we have plenty of singles, married couples, we have couples that have been married for decades. We have people with troubled marriages and we have people with great marriages. We have those who have tasted the bitter fruit of divorce. We have people who have remarried. We have widows and we have widowers that come to GraceLife. It is not too much to say – in fact it is almost axiomatic – that every one of us has been profoundly influenced by this institution of marriage, some of us for good, some with more bitter results. And this thing that we call marriage affects all of us and it deserves our close attention as we turn our minds to the word of God where God has revealed His will for the marriage relationship. And in the midst of this great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus brings marriage and divorce to the forefront in the passage that we are about to look at.

Now with all of our visitors and with the fact that it has been a few weeks since I have been in the Sermon on the Mount with you, I want to take just a moment to reset the context for you and kind of bring us all onto the same page. In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7, Jesus is describing the life that flows from someone who has truly repented. In Matthew 4:17 – you can look at that with me – He says:

*From that time, Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

And what is this kingdom of heaven? Who is it that is in the kingdom of heaven? Who is that is repented? Matthew 5:3 – Jesus makes the connection – He says:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

And then He flows into this three-chapter-long exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. And so Jesus is describing in the Sermon on the Mount the marks of someone who is truly repentant. He is describing the life that flows out of the new heart. He is describing the kind of righteousness that is required and that marks the true citizens of His kingdom. And as we have looked at in the past when we talk about that kind of righteousness, when we talk about the life that flows from someone who is truly repentant, we have come to recognize this very important point: In the kingdom of heaven, in the life of a true Christian, God requires and God produces – in the act of regeneration and the life that flows from that, God requires a heart-felt spirituality from those who are in His kingdom.

Now, this was radical teaching when Jesus gave it because it was far different from the dominating external religion of the Pharisees, who ruled the spiritual scene for the Jews when Jesus appeared in His incarnation. Jesus said it is a spirituality that must conform to the perfect holiness and righteousness of God, it goes deep to your heart, it is reflected in inner attitude not just external behavior – that’s what God requires. And the good news is that God not only requires it, but through the working of the indwelling Holy Spirit, He produces it in the life of true followers of Jesus Christ.

If those attitudes that are found in the beatitudes are utterly lacking in someone’s life, you have every reason to question whether that person is a Christian. When you examine your life in light of the beatitudes and all that Jesus says throughout this sermon, you should see marks – you should see symptoms – of what your spiritual life looks like. The absence of it means that someone is not a Christian – that someone is on the broad road to destruction and eternal damnation because it is evident that they are living a life that is separated from the true and living God.

Now, with that little bit of overview – and I spent probably 25 messages developing all of those points – as we said on many occasions, and this is really, really crucial for understanding Jesus’ teaching on divorce: when we come to the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes it plain that what He is teaching is consistent with the principles that are found in the Old Testament. He is establishing continuity between the kind of righteousness that He requires and what God revealed and required in the Old Testament. Look at Matthew 5:17-18 with me where He said:

*Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the law until all is accomplished.*

In the chronological progress of God’s revelation, He gave the Old Testament first; there was a period of silence for about 400 years; and then Jesus steps on to the scene, having been born of the virgin Mary, having been incarnated in human flesh as the second

member of the Trinity. And Jesus begins to teach and, just as He says here in verses 17-18, He is teaching things that are consistent with what the Jews had always known in the Old Testament.

Now that is extremely important to keep in mind. Jesus, as He speaks in the Sermon on the Mount, was not turning revealed truth on its head in this sermon. Jesus was not contradicting the law. Rather, He is bringing out the full moral force of the law that had been hidden and covered up in all of the false teaching of the Pharisees and how they externalized everything. Jesus is cleaning the mirror as it were so we can get back to seeing what the true reflection was supposed to be. As one great commentator said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Jesus is honoring the Law of Moses and displaying it in its great fullness and glory.” That’s very important as we work through this whole matter of divorce.

Now, as you move from verse 20 into verses 21-48 in that long passage here that we are currently considering, Jesus is exposing the false teaching of the Pharisees in very consistent and very practical ways. He has just said in verse 20 – look at verse 20 with me – He said:

*Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

And so He is laying out what that surpassing righteousness looks like and in verses 21-48, He exposes the false teaching of the Pharisees and contrasts it with the true moral implications of Old Testament teaching. In the passages that we looked at recently in verses 21-30, Jesus showed that the true moral force of the law meant that hatred was as sinful as the act of murder itself. He said that a lustful look in the heart of a man is as sinful as the act of adultery. It goes to a heart-felt righteousness, a surpassing righteousness; it goes to the deepest part of the inner man. That’s what the Bible describes; that’s what flows from the life of someone who has truly repented and put his faith in Christ because God has made a new person – He has given them a new heart in regeneration and that new heart reflects the attributes of His own holiness. It couldn’t be any other way – it couldn’t be.

Now all of those things were contrary to the teaching of the Pharisees who cared nothing about the inner man so long as certain standards of external conduct were maintained. That’s why Jesus could say, “You are like white-washed tombs. You look beautiful on the outside, but on the inside you are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.” And so when we come to this Sermon on the Mount, we have an x-ray that is just examining the innermost part of our beings. And Jesus shows us that true righteousness is deeper and more searching than the Pharisees ever imagined.

Now, having dealt with the issues of anger and lust, today we are going to look at Jesus’ third illustration of the depth of righteousness that God requires as He teaches on this crucial matter of marriage and divorce. And that brings us to Matthew 5:31-32 – let’s read it together. In verse 31, Jesus says:

*It was said, "Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce"; but I say to you, that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

Now beloved, as Jesus teaches on divorce here, He is presupposing the entire institution of marriage. I would submit to you that before we can take a meaningful look at divorce, we need to remember God's original plan for marriage, and that's what we are going to do. And then we will probably leave most of our exposition of these verses till next week.

Before you can understand the issue of divorce, before you can understand the magnitude of the issues that are raised by a divorce and a remarriage, before you can do anything with those, you have to understand what the perfect standard was from the beginning. What is it that God revealed at His plan for marriage? Until you come to grips with that and understand that, the whole issue of divorce is not going to have the proper context to be understood. And Jesus is presupposing all of God's plan for marriage as He talks about verses 31-32.

So if you want to take some notes, you can jot down these next few thoughts under this first heading of:

### **1. God's Plan for Marriage**

We need to see God's plan for marriage before we talk about that which would break marriage in order to have a full look at the situation. It is not my intent here to be exhaustive or exhausting – I don't want to do either one of those things. I don't want to be exhaustive about the full topic of marriage or cover every biblical point that we could make; that would detain us for a number of weeks and that's not my intention. All we want to do here is to set some general parameters, some general principles so that we can make some better sense out of Jesus' teaching on divorce.

And so for a non-technical definition of marriage, let me define marriage in this way:

*Marriage is that God-ordained institution in which a man and woman covenant with one another to live as husband and wife in an exclusive, monogamous relationship for the remainder of their earthly lives.*

God established marriage; it was His idea. And so as we come together in marriage, we are coming together under an umbrella that God established long before we were ever born, before our parents ever thought of us. Long before anything else, long before even the fall of mankind into sin, God ordained marriage.

What I want us to do is to look at three pretty familiar passages just to get all of our thinking on the same page and in the right direction on these matters. To do that, turn to Genesis chapter 2. We are just going to draw up four principles about marriage before

we move into the whole matter of divorce as we look at God’s plan for marriage. Looking at Genesis chapter 2, beginning in verse 18, God had created man; He had put man into the Garden of Eden with all of the animals and all of the perfection of that environment. Man enjoyed walking with God during that time. But there came a point in God’s act of creation where, in verse 18, He said this:

*Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make him a helper suitable for him.”*

Now skipping down to verse 21:

*The Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept. Then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man and brought her to the man.*

*The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” – then this very critical text – For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*

That is the non-fallen – that is the original, un-impacted–by–sin version of what marriage should look like; this is God’s standard and pattern. Verse 25 says:

*And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*

Now with that passage from Genesis 2 in your mind, turn over to Matthew chapter 19, where Jesus expounds on this a little bit. We are just going to read three passages here and then draw some principles out from them. In Matthew chapter 19, beginning in verse 3 – we’ll come back to this passage later – Matthew 19:3:

*Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?”*

*Jesus answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning ‘made them male and female’ and said, ‘For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined 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 no man separate.”*

Notice that before Jesus responded to a question about divorce, He first discussed marriage. That’s the pattern that I am trying to follow as I preach these things to you here today. Consider marriage before you go into the details of the issues surrounding divorce. I wish more commentators did that.

But one more passage that I want you to look at is Ephesians chapter 5, a most familiar passage, one that in itself probably be enough to convict both men and women in this room as they contemplated their lives over the past week or month or whatever. But in Ephesians chapter 5, Paul uses marriage as an illustration of the relationship between Christ and the church. And in verse 22, he says:

*Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.*

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.*

*So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself, for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body.*

Verse 31:

*“For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.*

Now, those are three very important passages on the whole topic of marriage. From those passages, I want to glean out four major points as you think about God’s plan for marriage because it is this standard that establishes the parameters around which we consider divorce.

Marriage was God’s intent from the beginning of the perfect creation; He declared it to be good. Jesus said that this is something that no man should separate. The marriage institution, the marriage relationship, is so profound that it speaks to how Christ relates to believers and relates to His bride, the church. Marriage is really important and we need to get it right. So now, four little points about God’s original plan for marriage:

### **A. Marriage is a permanent union**

Firstly, marriage is intended to be a permanent union. In the Garden of Eden, God declared that the two would become one flesh. God’s ideal was a permanent and

exclusive relationship. Jesus said, “What God has joined together, let no man separate.” So it is intended to be a permanent union.

### **B. Marriage is an exclusive union.**

Secondly, marriage is intended to be an exclusive union. Permanent monogamy was the standard: one man with one woman until death separated them – that’s the standard.

### **C. Marriage is an intimate union.**

Thirdly, marriage is meant to be an intimate union. It is without question the deepest human relationship. Scripture says that a man becomes one flesh with his wife, which has more than physical implications. But the sexual union expresses that intimacy and must not be shared outside of marriage, either before marriage or after. One man with one woman, united together in a permanent, exclusive union that is to be intimate until the day they die.

Now with all of that said, the Ephesians passage brings out the fourth point for us:

### **D. Marriage is a loving union.**

Marriage is meant to be a loving union. It is intended to be so loving in fact that it pictures the love that Christ has for those for whom He shed His blood in order to wash away their sins. You look at the picture of Christ on the cross, the picture of the truth about Christ on the cross, dying as a substitute for your sins, you see the church in subjection to Him, you see the great love that is poured out for sinners through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and you see the picture of what marriage is supposed to be like. It is not an abstract, functional union; this is meant to be a loving relationship that goes between the husband and wife.

So it is a permanent union, an exclusive union, an intimate union and a loving union – that is God’s plan. And in God’s plan, marriage has a prominent role: it was part of creation, it was established before sin entered into the world, and it pictures the relationship of the church to Christ.

And so all of that to say is this: God has put marriage in a highly exalted place. To assault the institution of marriage either through governmental changes or, more pertinent for the believer, through your own sin and indifference to that relationship is to assault the very citadel of something that God established to be a monumental picture of His goodness to man, His concern for the companionship of man, and the picture of the relationship of Christ and His church.

The idea of sully that with sin, with adultery, with desertion is utterly abominable and something that we should settle in our hearts that we would reject for ever. The thought of leaving a wife, leaving a husband, because things just are not working out is unthinkable in the mind of God, in the totality of the way that God has orchestrated this



great institution of marriage. We not only need to, we *must*, hold marriage in a high view in our mind, hold it in a high view in our affections and be committed to preserving it and causing it to flourish in whatever we do.

Now beloved, when I take the time to get personal here – this principle of marriage, this institution of marriage, God’s plan for marriage, goes right to the heart of your life without question. The way that you treat your spouse is a reliable barometer of the true quality of your spiritual life. Don’t talk to me about how sound your theology is. It wasn’t that long ago that I heard about a pastor in another state who was so good in his theology, but all the while as he was articulating it, he was planning to abandon his wife for a former sweetheart. I mean, just make me nauseous and just make me throw up with that kind of approach to your theology in your marriage – that’s abominable! Sound theology in the abstract is no substitute for a righteous relationship with your spouse.

And so, over the course of your life, I would ask this question: *Has your spouse known marriage as something that was permanent, something that was exclusive, something that was intimate, something that was loving?* Notice that I am not asking whether you have known marriage in that way – that’s not my point at all; I am asking whether your spouse has. Because your responsibility is to live this out for the benefit of your spouse, not to question and wonder whether you are getting your due or not – that’s irrelevant to carrying out your responsibility in this God-ordained institution of marriage. I say without fear of contradiction, in terms of your accountability to God, that what you are bringing to the marriage is more important than what you are getting out of it.

Now with that said, I want to approach this also from a positive direction as well. As I mentioned, we have a lot of newly married couples and young families in GraceLife. And for you, your marriage vows are still somewhat fresh on your mind. You must have an approach to God’s plan for marriage – you must approach that institution of marriage, you must approach your relationship with your spouse, in such a way that it is settled in your mind as a conviction forever that divorce will never be an option no matter what comes in your life. You won’t entertain that thought for even a minute. I’m not talking about actually going through and hiring an attorney and all of that. I’m talking about in the deep recesses of your mind, that you never give room for that thought for even a minute, not even thirty seconds, not fifteen seconds, not five seconds, not for a nanosecond – you never give room for that thought to take seed in your heart.

No, my beloved young friends, you settle your heart on that matter that “I will never pursue a divorce.” You settle your heart there and you never let anything shake you from that conviction. No matter what the problems are that come, no matter what the disappointments are to come, no matter how your spouse sins against you, you settle in your mind that, “I’m never going that route. I’m not even going to give room for that thought. I’m going to set a boundary, I’m going to set barriers, I’m going to set a protection, around my heart that I’ll never give room for those termites to start eating away at that vow and that commitment that I made in the presence of God and many witnesses.”

As you do that for the sake of your spouse – for sure, you do that out of love for the one who has entrusted their life to you – but there is more to it than that. At the very core, you take that attitude, you adopt that unrelenting, uncompromising posture, in grateful response to the Lord Jesus Christ who died to save you from your sins, because you realize that that’s His standard – that He is the one who established marriage; He is the one who brought things together for you to just that person at that just that time. And you realize that the Lord Jesus Christ saved you from your sins, so you are going to do whatever He says to carry out His plan for marriage.

Then – and here’s where this really plays out – then, when a serious trial comes up, when serious problems come up as they inevitably do, you don’t contemplate divorce as a solution for even a minute. You have already settled that in your mind. You realize that your commitment to Christ means that you must have a righteous marriage that is permanent, exclusive, intimate, and loving, and nothing is going to separate that. And that fundamental approach leads you to a very practical consequence, a wonderful consequence actually, because it develops in you the attitude when those problems come up. You look at each other and you say, “You know, we might as well solve this because we are not going anywhere anyway. We might as well get this problem over with and behind us because I don’t want to live in the midst of this kind of problem, this kind of disagreement, this kind of discomfort or anxiety or the brittleness of a strained relationship. You know, we’ve got to sit down and work this out because we’re not going anywhere. So let’s get it worked out based on our commitment to Christ” – that’s the way it works.

Now with that said, I also want to say just a word to the single people in our midst. I haven’t forgotten about you. Some of you are happy in your singleness. Some of you are a tad impatient on the Lord’s timing, shall we say – I understand that. As you are waiting, look at God’s plan for marriage and let it shape the kind of spouse that you are looking for. Don’t let your impatience or your loneliness compromise the biblical standards you look for in a mate. If you have to wait and wait and wait, better to wait than end up hooked with a man or a woman that is not going to honor these things, even to the point of considering a marriage to an unbeliever – that’s unthinkable.

Let me encourage you to heed the words of Charles Spurgeon who said it could never promote “the comfort of any Christian man or woman to be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever. You are far better to remain in the cold of your unmarried life than to warm your hands at the fire of an unhallowed marriage.” Or, as one unmarried friend of mine has often said: “It is better to want something that you don’t have than to have something you don’t want.” That’s very true, particularly in the realm of marriage.

So beloved, God’s plan – and it’s a good plan, it’s a divinely wise plan, it’s an omniscient, omnipotent plan – is for a permanent, exclusive, intimate, and loving marriage. When you single people wait for that godly mate, God knows that you are single – prove your trust in Him, prove your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, by waiting for a spouse who shares a commitment to biblical marriage with you.

That's all a sampling of how we work out God's plan for marriage in our lives – just a sampling. The ramifications of it go everywhere, I understand that, but I don't want to tarry here any longer.

We have seen God's plan for marriage. As we come closer to Jesus' teaching on divorce in Matthew 5, we realize that we have to reckon with a second point here today and next week. We have to reckon with:

## **2. Sin's Perversion of Marriage**

God planned it perfectly; God established it well. But when man fell into sin, when man turned his back on his Creator, among the many earthly, temporal, and eternal consequences of that was that the marriage institution took a hit – sin perverted the institution. God's plan for marriage was good, but when mankind fell into sin, it had a devastating impact on marriage – not on the institution itself, but on the way people lived out marriage.

The institution was always good – just to be clear. But when sinners got involved with the institution, things got a little bit messed up – things got greatly messed up. Even in the book of Genesis – I don't know if you've ever thought about this – but even in the book of Genesis from that pristine time of creation at the end of chapter 2, and you go in through the remaining chapters of Genesis, you quickly see all kinds of adultery and bigamy, homosexuality, rape, and other matters that defaced God's plan for marriage – the impact was immediate. If sin went to the core of the relationship with God, then it is not surprising that it would go to the core of the most intimate human relationship that God established. And we see the effects of that all around us in the book of Genesis and in our lives together – I don't even need to make that point.

Now, keep this in mind. When God called Moses to leave his nation Israel in the book of Exodus, God had to legislate how to deal with these varieties of sin. He couldn't pretend like this situation didn't exist. He couldn't pretend like a bomb hadn't gone off in the middle of the room. There were consequences to that and God – as He revealed His law to Moses and Moses implemented it in the lives of the people of Israel – God had to deal, among other things, with the impact of sin on the marriage relationship.

And for the rest of our time this morning, I just want to lay out very quickly for you two aspects of sin's perversion of marriage that are found in the Old Testament, and then next week, this will become the foundation of what we talk about on Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

### **A. Adultery was grounds for death**

God commanded the death penalty for adulterers. Jot these references down. In Leviticus 20:10 for example we read:

*If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.*

And in Deuteronomy 22:22-24:

*If a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel.*

*If there is a girl who is a virgin engaged to a man and another man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death.*

Did you ever wonder why the penalty was so harsh? May be you have never even really thought about the fact or even recognized that the Old Testament requires this. Why such a harsh penalty for adulterer? I mean, we have gotten pretty used to it around in our lives. It is just part of the environment that we live in this Western culture of ours. Why such a harsh penalty? Get this: adultery violates the one flesh intimacy and exclusivity that is at the very heart of Gods plan for marriage. This perfect institution that God established has a knife plunged in its heart in the face of adultery. It is the spit on the pristine work of God. More than spit on it, it is to do unthinkable things to that intimacy, to that exclusivity, to that permanence, to that one flesh concept – it's a great evil, calling forth the strongest, deepest judgment of God.

And when you go to the New Testament, you see this condemnation repeated in Hebrews 13 where God says: "Fornicators and adulterers I will judge." And the fact that God required an immediate death penalty for adultery in the Old Testament shows just how abhorrent sexual sin is in His sight. Get this: not even the intended permanence of marriage could shield the adulterer from the harshest penalty for violating the exclusivity and intimacy of marriage. God intended marriage to be permanent, but when you committed adultery, the stone started falling down on your head. You commit adultery, you die – that is God's standard of holiness.

What I want you to understand about that is, that principle – that legal judgment found in the Old Testament – was intended to be the protective shield that God placed around His institution of marriage in the Old Testament. The one who violated it was dead. Those who stood and watched that happen said, "Oh, I think I'll stay home tonight." You commit adultery under Old Testament law, you die. That's how much God places a premium on the sanctity of marriage.

We will talk about how things shifted in a legal perspective at the time of Jesus next week. But adultery called forth death in the Old Testament; that was a protective shield that God placed around the institution of marriage.

Now, secondly, considering sin's perversion, in the Old Testament...

## B. Divorce was sometimes permitted but it was never the divine plan

Under our time constraint this morning, the best I can do is introduce this matter and pick it up again next week. I invite you to turn to Deuteronomy chapter 24, where Moses was kind of rehearsing God's works and God's standards for the people of Israel before they entered the Promised Land and before he himself would die. In Deuteronomy chapter 24:1 he says:

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

Now, that's a mouthful, that passage. In light of everything that I have said up to this point, it may seem surprising to see in the Old Testament a procedure that governs divorce. Why not insist on the permanence of marriage?

Well, in those days – and again, let's talk about this more next week – in those days, men had a low view of women and treated them like chattel. They believed they had a right to divorce their wives for almost any frivolous and unworthy reason. God's plan for marriage was being undermined by cheap and easy divorce. And what Moses describes in Deuteronomy 24 – this bill of divorcement was simply a measure to bring some order out of the chaos of man just verbally saying, "I'm tired of you, get out." And you have multiple men doing that, and it creates a chaotic situation. And so by introducing this procedure, God was protecting the woman from exploitation and deprivation. And the prohibition against remarrying her kept the first husband from walking in and out of marriage based on his own personal whim; it was bringing some structure into a chaos that sin had created. It was never commanded; it says if – God said your marriage should be permanent until the day you die – but if you insist, in the hardness of your heart, to pursue divorce anyway, here is what you must do. God never commanded divorce in the Old Testament; He never condoned divorce; He simply regulated it under the conditions found in Deuteronomy 24.

Now with that said – and I know we are just about out of time – come back to Matthew chapter 5 for just a moment. I just spent the last 50 minutes introducing next week's sermon. Now in Matthew 5:31, Jesus says:

*It was said, "Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce..."*

He is acknowledging this Old Testament regulation and the perversion of the Pharisees in using that which we will talk about next week. But notice what Jesus says. Jesus says forget this easy divorce stuff, forget the certificate of divorce stuff. I'll tell you what the true standard is:

*I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity – or, sexual immorality – makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

Jesus says forget this easy divorce stuff – God's standard for marriage still stands. The fact that men have abused it and changed it and tried to pervert it doesn't change anything. Suffice it to say that when Jesus teaches on divorce here in Matthew 5, He is calling the Pharisees and by extension you and me back to God's original plan for marriage – permanent, exclusive, intimate, and loving – and He accepts nothing less. And that's where we will go back to next time.

Now, I would say this: We can't consider these things without feeling a sense of conviction of sin. We have sinned against God's pure standards either in thought, word, or act. We need a savior. We need the risen Lord Jesus Christ who suffered and died to take the sin of every sinner who would ever believe in Him. Adulterer, unfaithful one, have you truly repented and put your faith in Christ? The glory of the gospel is that He welcomes even adulterers, even the worst of sinners, even those who have wrecked their marriages, but they have come to Him in humble faith. It is on that note that we will close in prayer.

*Our Father, we've only been able to introduce this material today and we feel a little bit incomplete without being able to bring it to a conclusion. But we trust You for the power of Your word to accomplish Your purposes in whichever direction You intend to take it.*

*Father, would You draw our hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ? Would You make us mindful of His death and resurrection as the payment for our sin and our only hope of being reconciled to You? And for those of us that know You, Father, that are either contemplating marriage or in the middle of marriage, would You bring our hearts and our convictions back to Your plan and give us grace to live them out in the way that would be worthy of Your original intent and of the restoration that Christ has accomplished in our lives.*

*Give us grace to that end in the coming week we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.*