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Jesus' Teaching on Divorce

Mark 10:1-12

Prayer: *Father, we just again thank you for your grace, we thank you for your goodness, we thank you for the gift of your word, we thank you for the gift of your Son. And Lord, this day especially we focus in on you and what it is that you've done, how you've taught us and continue to teach us by your life and by your word. We just continue to pray this morning as we open up that word we would have the privilege of your Holy Spirit guiding and directing us. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well this is communion Sunday, and again this is the day that we remember Jesus Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died he met with his disciples and for the last time celebrated a Passover meal. It's recorded in Matthew 26 which says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of*

sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

So Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood and then he asked his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup in order to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat this remembrance on a regular basis and it's what we call "the Lord's table." We celebrate it once a month and we do that by meditating on the Lord Jesus Christ and what he did for us on the cross, by examining ourselves and that means asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas in our lives where he's convicting us of sin, by then confessing our sins and then participating in the elements. *John 6:53* says: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

So we're following the life of Christ, we're following it in the gospel of Mark and we're at that stage where Jesus' public ministry is winding to an end. He's been giving intense instruction to his disciples who have been fighting and bickering among themselves and at this point Jesus finds himself surrounded by crowds and once again he's dealing with a controversy with the Pharisees. This is

Mark 10:1-9. It says: And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them. And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. Therefore a man shall leave his father and 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."

Well if this passage sounds familiar it's the exact one that we looked at last month. Last month we focused on a statement that Jesus made that focuses on God's plan for mankind with regard to gender, and that's verse 6. It says: *But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'* And we noted that instead of getting bogged down in the minutia of divorce laws Jesus went to God's original design and he knew that that is precisely where the enemy was attacking, and we needed to know that as well. I mean we need to do just what Jesus did when he responded to the Pharisees and that is he went back to God's original design. And right then and right there he planted a stake that to this day

remains absolutely immovable and that is that all of creation is in fact binary, and that means two. It means there are only two choices for mankind, you are either male or you are female, period; end of statement. All of the discussions about gender fluidity and multiple genders, they're all rooted in a rebellion against one simple fact that Jesus stated categorically: You are either XX female or XY male and every one of us has hundreds of billions of cells in our bodies that all testify to that fact.

But that's not all that Jesus was teaching about. He didn't get hung up in the minutia of divorce laws as the Pharisees would have loved but he did state one very basic principle that we've drawn on and still draw on in our understanding of how God views divorce. It's in verse 9. He says: *"What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."* So this morning I want to focus in on that aspect of what Jesus taught and I want to go back to a lesson that I gave many, many years ago in a teaching on the sermon on the mount there Jesus was revisiting the whole topic of divorce, and this is what he said in *Matthew 5:31*. It says: *"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 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."*

Well Jesus is responding to a classic pharisaical technique that they engaged in to kind of manage God, and as usual they had everything backwards. What mattered little to them mattered a great deal to Jesus and what mattered a great deal to Jesus mattered to them very, very little. 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 a certificate for divorce. See, the Pharisees had taken their teaching from *Deuteronomy 24* in which Moses 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 of 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 looking at that passage would conclude that the main idea that Moses has presented there is one of extra-marital defilement. What Moses is saying is that a wife being put

out with a certificate of divorce becomes defiled by the second marriage, so much so that even if her second husband divorces her or dies she's not to return to her former husband because now she's been defiled by that second marriage. Well somehow or other the Pharisees managed to twist that discussion so that what really mattered to them, it was not the defilement of remarriage, it was all about the certificate of divorce.

Furthermore the Pharisees expanded on the idea of the wife being put out for some -- quote -- "indecent" found in her. Well we know that that couldn't have been the sin of adultery because we know that that sin was punishable by death. We also know it had to be some serious character flaw, something that had to be considered an indecent, but the Pharisees, they chose instead to focus on the idea that she no longer finds favor in her husband's eyes. And they had a field day with that understanding, labeling as causes for divorce trivialities such as burning dinner or talking too much or too loudly or putting too much salt on the meat. This is why Jesus held them in absolute scorn. They presumed to be speaking for God while they were saying things that God detested. They trivialized the idea that God hated divorce by turning it into something that only needed a certificate in order to be legitimate. In fact they at one point, they tested Jesus with their understanding, they asked him in *Matthew 19*: "*Is it lawful to*

divorce one's wife for any cause?" And their emphasis was on the word "any" because they had already reduced divorce to a matter of legality and certificates. Well Jesus responds by saying in our text this morning: *But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. Therefore a man shall leave his father and 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 they thought they had the legal argument all pinned down; it's just a matter of paperwork. Jesus goes back to the original creation story to reiterate that God's design is for marriage to be permanent. And they respond like classic Pharisees, pointing out the requirement of the law that they saw that made divorce legitimate and it was a certificate. *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 had everything backwards.

I've mentioned this before but the certificate of divorce was a protection that was given by God for wives. These are often victims of the very hardness of heart that Jesus was talking about. Listen to what John Maxwell says. He says: "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 that certificate itself, that was a huge improvement over just announcing the marriage is over and just throwing her out of the house, which is what they used to do. It required careful deliberation and it had to be registered as an official document that was in the equivalent of their courts. And still Jesus identified the whole process as concession to their sinful hard heartedness. *Matthew 19 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."*

Well it's this final comment, this one that we find here in verse 9 that two different schools of thought concerning divorce and remarriage hang on. Jesus actually makes four different statements

on divorce, two of which have no qualifiers, two of which have very important qualifiers that we're going to discuss this morning.

This is *Luke 16:18*. This is all Jesus's words. He says:

"Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery." Then in Mark 10, 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."

Now neither of these verses has a qualifier but the following two do. This is *Matthew 19*, this is again Jesus speaking: *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."* And then in *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.*

Well now the only difference in the statements that Jesus makes in *Matthew 19* and *5* is the phrase that's come to be known as "the exception clause," and the text states it very clearly, it says

adultery is a covenant breaker. You know standard protestant orthodoxy always allowed for three different legitimate ways for a marriage to end. They've been referred to as the three D's, they are: death, defilement and desertion. The first one, death, self-explanatory, I mean, no one disputes the fact that widows and widowers are free to remarry and the scripture makes that clear in *1 Corinthians 7*, 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 have a lot of issues with. Defilement's simply another 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 I first want to explain the other D which is desertion. I want to explain the scriptural basis for it being a legitimate means for ending a marriage.

This is Paul's words in *1 Corinthians 7:10-17*. 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.

So what God's saying here is that no marriage should be ended at the instigation of a believing spouse. And the assumption here is that one of the partners has come to Christ subsequent to being married because God is unequivocal that no Christian should ever marry a non-Christian. He makes that clear in *2 Corinthians 6:14: 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?*

Some of you know but many of you can imagine that there's 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 resented the faith of the believing spouse and saw that faith commitment as a profound threat to their own status within the marriage. You know, the image that God is using here of a believer and unbeliever marrying is two different animals that are being yoked together for a common task. Just imagine the donkey being yoked together with a sheep. One is built to plow, the other is built to graze; put them together they will do neither. I mean what happens when a spouse begins resenting the time you spend going to church? When they think the whole idea of tithing is absolutely crazy and when decisions have to be made about what kind of an education the kids are going to receive? God says: *For 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 complete and utter foolishness.

Well, such is the life of those who are unequally yoked. God says if you're in such a situation, if you found Christ but perhaps your spouse has not, he says to remain in it 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 a marriage becomes unbearable and it's ended by the believing spouse,

the only option really is reconciliation with no subsequent remarriage until all chance of reconciliation is removed by the death of the spouse or by their remarriage. However, the scripture says: *But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved.*

See, most Protestants believe that in these circumstances when the unbelieving spouse has essentially deserted the believing spouse then after enough ensuing time has passed or if she has remarried or he has remarried, the believing spouse is free to remarry. This is the second of the three legitimizing reasons put forth for divorce and remarriage.

Now you may not be facing a situation like this, problem is I guarantee someone you know or someone you will know at some point will because all of us know marriages are exploding. And there's a reason why Jesus had these conversations. The reason why so that we could know God's will in this instance. You know, our positions on divorce are not made up of whole cloth. They're carefully considered in the light of scripture.

So as we go to communion this morning I'd like us to all consider those who might need grace or wisdom in this area. *1 Corinthians 11* gives us the basis for preparation for communion. It says this:

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

I repeat this every month, I point out how incredibly serious communion is and that to enter into communion in an unworthy manner is literally to court disaster. If you're not absolutely confident that you're a child of the King, if you haven't by faith trusted in Christ as your Savior, if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or sister before you bring the sacrifice of yourself to this altar, then just pass the elements on. If you don't feel right about participating, then err on the side of caution and get right with God first.

And as I often point out as well, on the other hand you can make the mistake of thinking, okay, I have to be absolutely flawless in order to receive communion and that, too, is a mistake. Being a child of the King does not mean that you don't sin, it doesn't mean that you don't fail; it does mean that we recognize that salvation is a gift that no one is ever capable of earning simply by being

good. We quote this quote each month from Dane Ortlund because it so sums up exactly what the attitude should be towards the idea of communion and that's: "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." And again it also means that when we fail, we are aware that we've sinned because God's spirit is within us, God's spirit is convicting us, and so it grieves us but we know we have a Father who longs to forgive and cleanse us, who says: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

So being a child of the King doesn't mean that you're sinless, it means that when we do sin we recognize that up there in heaven there is an advocate right now speaking on our behalf. *1 John* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* And that's the key right there. What that says, because we know we have Jesus' righteousness and not our own, we know that we are free to eat from his table. And so if you love your Lord, do not deny yourself the privilege that he purchased for you. He lived the life that we were supposed to live then he died the death that we all deserved to die so that we could be made worthy of this very moment of

coming to his table.

And as we approach this, take some time to examine your own attitude about marriage. I mean in the light of the culture that now sees marriage vastly different than God sees it, have I been following the culture or have I been following God? Take a moment to think on that as you prepare.

1 Corinthians 11 says: *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."* So take, and eat.

Again we're looking at these three D's, we have death, which is obvious; desertion, but only by the unbelieving spouse; and finally we have this idea of defilement. Well defilement happens when a spouse commits adultery. One of the reasons why God speaks of such extreme measures when discussing adultery is because adultery is an extremely serious sin.

We happen to live in a culture that now winks and chuckles at adultery. But Jesus introduces the idea of marriage being defiled by adultery by saying this in *Matthew 5:27*, he says: *"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 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!"

What Jesus is doing, he's just describing extraordinarily serious consequences for an extraordinarily serious sin. And to understand why the covenant of marriage being broken through adultery is so serious, you have to understand what Jesus is declaring in our text this morning. He's declaring that marriage goes back to the original creation order that God established all the way back in the Garden of Eden. Listen to Jesus' response to a group of incredulous Pharisees. This is *Matthew 19*. Jesus says to them: *"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."*

Well we find the apostle Paul repeating the very same statement in

Ephesians 5. 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 something that's key, he says: *This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.* And it's right here where we discover what really matters to God about marriage. You see, your marriage is an expression of the love of Christ for his church. In a very real way it's no different than the way you are a bearer of God's image, it's just something that goes with the territory.

You see, you don't choose whether or not you're going to portray Christ's love in your marriage, your marriage exists as an expression of that love. Once you're married the choice is only whether you portray Christ's love for the church poorly or well.

You know folks have this need for self-expression. You can see that in bumper stickers, you see that in tattoos, tattoos are just bumper stickers that you bring with you wherever you go. I mean the day that you marry, that's the day that you start laying down spiritual ink expressing Christ's love for his church. If it's a spiritual tattoo, it's the only tattoo that really matters because it carries with it you and your spouse's personal expression of what Jesus did when he died for us. You know *Ephesians 5:25* says: *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave*

Himself for her. Verse 22 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.

This is the mystery part, this is the mystery part that matters so much to God but is so often overlooked. Marriage was designed by God to paint a portrait in the spirit world of the love that Christ has for his church. It's the most important portrait you will ever compose. Every single day of your married life by your life you paint and repaint a portrait of how much and how Christ loves his church. We paint that portrait largely for a world we've never seen, for a world we don't really know but it's a world that has a lot more eternal reality than the one that we're in right now here today.

God says we're surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who live in that world and they're the ones that we're painting this portrait for, and we paint it by how we as husbands and wives love and respect each other. That's why divorce is so terrible. Divorce takes the painting right off the easel. It just puts a big X right through the middle of the tattoo and it brings to an end all of the creative struggles to love and declares the portrait has failed.

I mean, it's no wonder that God says in *Malachi 2:16*: "*For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce.*" And yet there are

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.* See, I believe God has carved out a very limited area where the covenant is shattered by adultery that allows for divorce and remarriage. And I say this with some hesitation because there are far better men than me who are far more gifted and far more biblically knowledgeable who don't see it that way. I mean I see Jesus describing an exception to the rule for divorce and remarriage. There are others who see it not as an exception at all but simply as a statement of a matter of fact. They see Jesus in this statement as simply restating the obvious.

Let me put it another way with a different sin. Talk about the sin of stealing. Terrible circumstances. Let's say you lose your food, your clothing, your shelter, those terrible circumstances can turn you into a thief unless of course you were a thief to start out with. Well, what some see Jesus as saying here in *Matthew 5:32: Everyone who divorces his wife, except in a case of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery* is that divorce turns a wife into an adulteress with the exception of divorce for sexual immorality in which case she already was an adulteress. They believe there's no exception that can end a marriage other than

death and that includes the exception for desertion as well. So I just want to briefly argue their case even though it's not what I believe.

This is what Paul says in *1 Corinthians 7*. He says: *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.* Well these folks understand Paul to be saying that stating you're no longer enslaved to the marriage itself doesn't necessarily grant you the freedom to remarry. This is a position of men like John Piper and others that I have a great deal of respect for, and I'm bringing them to you only as a means of giving you full disclosure. I want you to see both sides of this issue. Their answer to remarried couples who have found themselves convicted of a remarriage that they feel was sinful is to acknowledge the sin, recognize God's mercy extends to all and to trust God's mercy that will heal the present marriage.

This is the way Piper puts it. He says: *"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 again, this is not the position that we take. We believe that desertion and defilement are legitimate means of ending a marriage and also provide a legitimate excuse for remarriage. And this is not some new and modern approach to divorce, in fact the position that we hold is the very same one as the Westminster Confession of Faith which was written in 1646.

In Chapter 24, Section 5 it says -- quote -- "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'm just stating Westminster's position, not in any way suggesting they're on a par with scripture but just to point out that good men and women have been wrestling with this scriptural teaching on divorce and remarriage for literally hundreds of years.

Our take away position on this is simple. I mean we all know God hates divorce. We know that it takes the portrait of the mystery of Christ's love for his church, it takes it off the easel and it declares it a failure. We know it's a tragedy and we also know the

Pharisees tried to turn it simply into a technicality. You know the Pharisees excelled at trying to box that into a series of external behaviors. Just do what you're told, and you can manage God and keep him at bay. The entire issue of marriage and divorce is far more complex and difficult than to yield the simple formulas like the Pharisees advocated.

So we wonder or at least I wonder why so much surrounding the issue of divorce and remarriage lies shrouded in a fog of uncertainty, and I wonder if that too is by design. You know when we pull back to the ten thousand foot level and look at what Jesus is saying, we see that Jesus is genuinely despising how the Pharisees took every single aspect of a person's intimate relationship with God and just reduced it to a series of rules and regulations. And by the time we find Jesus clashing with the Pharisees, they had reduced divorce down just to a simple procedure, I mean, get the proper certificate, you're good to go, literally. Jesus blows that notion out of the water. And we're still 2,000 years later trying to discern exactly what he meant by saying: *"And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."*

So 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'd also say this, we are not the Pharisees. We cannot reduce God down to a series of rules and regulations where one size fits all. See, the bottom line is this: Each and every one of us has an obligation to come before God, to seek his will, to engage in the counsel of other brothers and sisters as well; but each one of us is responsible for our own conviction about this matter.

Now there are some who will remain fully convinced that after divorce God has precluded remarriage and there are some who will be fully convinced that marriage is allowed. Trust me, 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 a very specific answer, and the principle is found in *Romans 14*. *Literally everyone must be fully convinced in his own mind.* Paul says: *Do you have a conviction? Keep it to yourself before God. The man who does not condemn himself by what he approves is blessed.* In other words there's a God honoring way to approach circumstances that aren't crystally clear in scripture and the principle here that matters most is a desire to be open, transparent and willing to hear what God's Holy Spirit is speaking to each and every one of us who come before him simply desiring his will and not ours.

The fact is every single rule in scripture, if it's looked on as a rule and not a guideline, it can be manipulated. Take Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians that if an unbelieving spouse desires to leave, so be it. I could certainly see and I know of situations where someone wanting to work the rules just treated their unbelieving spouse so poorly that they forced him to leave, and then claimed they were following the letter of the law so they're now free to remarry, as if God can't see precisely what's going on. That's the kind of pharisaical mindset that Jesus hated. That's why Jesus said in *Matthew 15*: "*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.*" See, what Jesus is looking for from all of us is a commitment of the heart that seeks his will in all things including divorce and remarriage.

To reiterate, I believe there are three existing circumstances that allow for divorce and remarriage: There's death, there's desertion, and there's defilement. That's just my opinion. I'm a sinful man just like all of us. And as 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 and seek his will for your future. He's looking for you to become fully convinced in your own mind

what the Holy Spirit's desire for you is.

I can also tell you what God's not looking for. He's not looking for someone who wants to work the system as if it were a set of rules that he or she could work to their advantage. In the area of divorce and remarriage God wants your heart fully committed to seek out his will regardless the circumstances, 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. I have on more than one occasion heard people accuse the church of being highly exorcised about same-sex marriage and caring very, very little about divorce and remarriage. Well there's a word for that and that word is hypocrisy, and the world is only too happy to point it out.

Listen, the Lord Jesus left heaven itself and he came to earth, he lived out his life perfectly among us and then willingly allowed himself to be stripped, beaten and nailed to a cross so that he could pay the price of our sin. And knowing that we now stand before God completed with Christ's righteousness as our own and we now want more than anything to serve and obey the God who died for

us. That should be the motivation for everything we do including the state of our marriages.

So as we begin to take the cup, understand what God is looking for in his relationship with us. It's not technical compliance, it's a heart that wants to line itself up with his heart, it's a spirit that seeks his will more than anything else and the wisdom to trust in his word. Think on that as you prepare to take the cup.

1 Corinthians 11:25 says: In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." So take and drink.

This is the part that we call heart, hands, and feet where we try to have kind of a practical application of what it means to remember Christ. Again so much of what we are talking about today used to be done in Sunday school but folks don't come to Sunday school and folks don't learn about what what's going on, they don't understand what the Bible is trying to say, so we wind up having to do this sermonically as opposed to teaching it in a regular class and so you get it in sermons now.

But what I want to conclude this morning is a statement that Kevin

DeYoung wrote about divorce and remarriage and same-sex marriage and all of this stuff that surrounds the church and surrounds this whole topic. I just want to read to you what he says because I think it's extraordinarily pertinent to us. He says -- quote -- "It's 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. 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." So let's pray

for that.

Father, I just thank you. This is a hard teaching, this is a hard topic. I just pray that those who have sat through it and heard it and listened have been blessed by your Spirit and not by my words. Lord, I pray that you would use what is your word and what is your rules, what is your teaching, what is your heart, that you would use that to guide and direct and counsel each and every one of us. And I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.