

The Permanence View of Marriage

The Sermon on the Mount

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Well, as we continue in the Sermon on the Mount, we come to chapter 5, verse 31, verses 31 and 32. We looked on last week at this issue of adultery, the question of adultery, and if you remember, as we examined the issue of adultery, we recognized the same pattern that Jesus continues throughout these six antitheses after he's given us the sort of key to understanding the law of God in light of the kingdom, he gives us these six antitheses so we can see what that looks like and how it works itself out. We saw as it related to murder, then we saw as it related to adultery, this pattern that Jesus said, "You've heard this but I say this." In other words, he's speaking to two groups of individuals. On the one hand, he's speaking to those individuals who are without the law, of course, those individuals who are disobedient to the law, of course, calling them to God's law, which is perfect, which is timeless, which is applicable, although it is insufficient to say, but he is also speaking to those individuals who are keeping the law and who believe that it is their keeping of the law in and of itself that justifies them before God and he says it is as wrong to keep the law believing that that will justify you as it is wrong to not keep the law. Therefore this statement again and again and again, "You've heard it said but I say to you."

Well, here we continue with the seventh commandment, this commandment related to adultery, and we learned on last week that not only do we see adultery there or the seventh commandment rather, when we look at adultery, but we also see the tenth commandment coveting your neighbor's wife, and we also see a violation of the first commandment because ultimately this is an act of idolatry. The second or the third antithesis is inexorably linked to the second. Jesus is actually continuing his discussion of the issue of adultery with this antithesis just like he was on the last, but he brings into it a completely different issue, and that is the issue of divorce and remarriage.

This is the statement I want to start with from a book "Divorce and Remarriage: A Permanence View." Listen to this statement by the authors, "Divorce and wrongful marriage are forgivable sins. We want to start here at the heart of our faith in Christ. When Jesus died, he did not fail to atone for the misdeeds of his people in this critical area, even the person who has acted as wrongly as possible in this matter may be fully forgiven and may have a fulfilled life of service to God after repentance. Also, God mercifully blesses many second marriages that begin sinfully. This is a mystery for which

we can all be extremely grateful." I think it's important that we start right there. Oftentimes we talk about divorce within the context of the church, almost like we do leprosy, you know, as though the worst people need to, you know, walk around, you know, holding out their hand and saying, "Unclean! Unclean!" That's actually not the case, especially when you understand it in the context of what Jesus is teaching here in the Sermon on the Mount. The goal here for Christ was not to condemn individuals who had experienced divorce and/or remarriage, his goal was to make a statement about marriage itself in spite of the way it's often viewed culturally. Let me say also that as we look at this issue, we're looking at it from a permanence view. I'll explain more about the permanence view as we go along, but just know that the overwhelming majority of people in modern American Christian circles do not hold to the permanence view that we hold.

Here's our test. "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,' Matthew 5:31 and 32. There's the statement, the shortest of all these antitheses. It's very concise and to the point. "You've heard it said," referring to what? Referring to the Old Testament law, but here's what's interesting, before we've kind of referred to the sixth commandment, "You've heard it said you shall not murder," then we refer to the seventh commandment, "You've heard it said you shall not commit adultery," Here we sort of go indirectly and we're not in the 10 Commandments, we're actually in the case law. So Jesus is actually referring here to the case law, not necessarily directly to the commandments. This is related to the seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery," but Jesus here makes a direct link to the case law in Deuteronomy 24.

What is he referring to? Glad you asked. Here it is Deuteronomy 24:1 through 4. "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 that's the critical phrase there, "some indecency in her," a lot of disagreement about what that meant even in Jesus' day, "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." That's the case law in Deuteronomy 24 to which Jesus is referring when he makes his statement here in Matthew 5 and its parallels that we shall also look at, also his statement in Matthew 19 which we shall also look at momentarily. But this is the case law in question. Remember the case law in Leviticus and in Deuteronomy is basically an outworking of God's moral law. There are also issues there of God's ceremonial law but it's an outworking of those laws, how do we apply the law of God to these particular situations, and this is case law applying the law of God to the particular situation of divorce and remarriage.

Now there are two schools of thought during Jesus' day. Now this is more important for us when we get to Matthew 19 because he's being questioned directly by the Pharisees, but there are two schools of thought, there is the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel. Shammai and his followers interpreted the expression "some indecency in her" to refer to gross indecency, though not necessarily adultery. So this was the more conservative school of thought. They believed that a woman had to be guilty of some gross indecency, some gross immorality in order for Deuteronomy 24 to be applied. Hillel was a little more, shall we say, generous in his interpretation of Deuteronomy 24. He extended the meaning of some kind of indecency beyond sin to all kinds of real or imagined offenses, including an improperly cooked meal. Well, well. I guess you could say that was a bit of a broader interpretation of the case law there. So these are the schools of thought that predominate in Jesus' day, the Shammai school and the Hillel school. Again, this will come into play more directly when we look at the parallel in Matthew 19 on this issue because there he's being questioned directly by the Pharisees.

Remember, these principles to bear in mind, we've talked about these already, but as we go through these antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount, remember if we're going to understand what Jesus is teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, the law of God is perfect, timeless, and relevant, yet insufficient for our salvation. That's the first principle that we hold onto as we interpret every one of these antitheses. Secondly, Jesus is our key to interpreting the Old Testament in light of the kingdom. He's our key to interpreting the Old Testament in light of the kingdom. Remember, we were asking ourselves what do we do with these Old Testament laws? How do we apply these Old Testament laws? How do we obey these Old Testament laws? Again, not in order that we might be justified, but in order that we might walk in the righteousness to which we have been called, how do we do that? How do we interpret that? There's difficulty there. Here in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus gives us the key to understanding and interpreting the law of God in light of the kingdom. Finally, our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. Remember that principle as well here in the Sermon on the Mount. Our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. And we'll say this again because it bears mentioning again, we hear that word "Pharisee" and our automatic knee-jerk reaction is these are rotten, stinking, nasty people. They're hypocrites. They're everything. Realize to the original hearers when they hear Jesus say "your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees," they hear him saying "your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the most righteous people you or any of your friends"? No, because the Pharisees were understood to be the most righteous law-keepers in all of Israel. Period. Bar none. By the way, it doesn't make sense otherwise, does it? If the Pharisees are these just sort of rotten nasty people and Jesus says your righteousness needs to exceed the righteousness of those rotten, nasty people that we all know are not righteous, what sense does that make? It makes no sense at all if we look at Phariseeism through our contemporary lenses. Only when we look at Phariseeism through the lens of the original hearers do we understand the magnitude and significance of the statement that Jesus just made. He basically says think about the most righteous people you can imagine and the righteousness to which you are being called in this Sermon on the Mount must exceed their righteousness. "But Jesus, they have 613 laws that they strive to keep every day." I know they do, your righteousness must exceed theirs. "Jesus, they've got a law for

everything." I know they do, but your righteousness must exceed theirs. "Jesus, they have laws to protect them from laws." I know but your righteousness if you're going to be a kingdom citizen must exceed theirs. And through these antitheses Jesus goes on to make it clear that what he's calling us to is not a lifestyle that says they have 613 laws, we'll have 614 laws. No, he's talking about the righteousness of the inner man. That only comes as a result of being a citizen of the kingdom.

So major divorce and remarriage camps. Here are the major views. 1. The permanence view: no divorce, no remarriage under any circumstances. No divorce, no remarriage under any circumstances. 2. The semi-permanence view allows for divorce but doesn't allow for remarriage. Allows for divorce but doesn't allow for remarriage. And then there is the permissive view, allows for divorce and allows for remarriage. These are the three basic views. Okay, there are nuances within each of these views, but these are the three basic views when it comes to the issue of divorce and remarriage within church. Either one of these views, the permanence view, the semi-permanence view, or the permissive view. No divorce, no remarriage allowed; semi permanence you may divorce but you may not remarry; permissive view you may divorce and you may remarry. By the way, if you think this is sort of clear-cut, look at this list of individuals. On the permissive side you have guys like John MacArthur, John Frame, Andreas Kostenberger, D. A. Carson. How about in the permanence view? Well, Dwight Pentecost, James Montgomery Boice, Abel Isaacson, John Piper. So again, can we stand here and argue that there are certain people who just don't handle the scriptures well and therefore they have this view and there are other people who just, "No, not at all. Not at all." So we're not arguing that we have a corner on the market here, we're not arguing that, you know, we break fellowship with individuals who don't hold to the permanence view. That's not our position at all. In fact, you know we use Andreas Kostenberger's book, "God, Marriage and Family," for our course on biblical manhood and womanhood marriage. We love Kostenberger's book. It is wonderful even though he holds a different view on the issue of divorce and remarriage than we do. It's not a deal breaker. It doesn't mean that we can't have fellowship with him. It's not a deal breaker. Doesn't mean that people can't be members of this church. There are members of this church who have experienced divorce and remarriage okay? So our position is not our way or the highway, our way or you're not right with God. That's not our position. Our understanding of the permanence view, we'll share with you how it's derived and why it's the position to which we hold, but we don't argue that everybody else is out in the weeds, okay? But we have to have a position here.

Permissive views, the one-clause permissive view: this is those who say you can have divorce and remarriage. There are those individuals who say, "Yes, you can have divorce and remarriage in the case of adultery only. In the case of adultery only. Not in the case of abandonment and not for anything else." Two-clause view: you may divorce and remarry in the case of adultery and in the case of abandonment of a believing spouse by an unbelieving spouse, okay? Abandonment of a believing spouse by an unbelieving spouse. They find that, for example, in 1 Corinthians 7, okay? So they argue that you can divorce and remarry if the reason for the divorce was the abandonment of a believing spouse by an unbelieving spouse. Finally, the liberal view: divorce and remarriage for adultery, for abandonment, and for just about anything else as well.

Now here's what people often argue, they often argue that, "You know, you permanence view guys have difficulty from a pastoral perspective because it's difficult to have a position that says you don't allow for divorce and remarriage under any circumstances. I mean, you're going to have people who, you know, are in bad situations and you're going to say no they can't get divorced. You're going to have people who are divorced because they were in bad situations and you're going to say no, you can't get remarried. But here's what I want you to understand: there's difficult regardless of what your position is. Most of the church and I'm speaking conservatives here, especially those who are conservative Reformed, kind of in our camp, most of those people who have a one-clause or two-clause position, they still have difficulty here because they say you can only divorce and only remarry for adultery, that must be the cause of it, or only when a believing spouse is abandoned by an unbelieving spouse. They still have difficulties, and there's still people who they have to look in the eye and say, "No, you may not divorce." And there's still people who may have to look in the eye and say, "No, you may not remarry."

Can I give you a few examples? Abandonment by a believer. If you're a two-clause person, you cannot authorize a divorce if the abandonment was by a believer. That's not what scripture teaches even if you hold that position. Next, abuse. Two-clause people who disagree with us, there's a person who's in an abusive marriage, that is not biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage. Neglect, he's neglecting me. That's not biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage. Incompatibility, not biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage. Fiscal irresponsibility, he spent all of our money, we're broke, we have nothing. Every time he gets his hands on our money, he's off to the track and he loses it all. That's not a biblical grounds for divorce even if you don't hold to our position. Idolatry, not biblical grounds for divorce. Blasphemy, not biblical grounds for divorce. Lying and deceit, not biblical grounds for divorce. And again, I'm talking about people who hold to the one-clause or the two-clause position, not just permanence view folks. These are the difficulties that they run into, refusing to have children, not biblical grounds for divorce. Drunkenness, or drug use, not biblical grounds for divorce. Lengthy incarceration, husband or wife goes to jail, he's got a 20-year, 50-year sentence, going to get divorced so that they can be free to go and marry again. Small problem, that's not biblical grounds for divorce. And again, I'm not talking about just our view. Of course it wouldn't be in our view. I'm talking about even if you're a two-clause person. If you're seriously a two-clause person and you believe only adultery and only abandonment of a believer by an unbeliever, none of these would be circumstances under which you would allow a person to divorce and/or remarry. Finally, unbelief in prior marriage. For example, when this happened, I was an unbeliever, that's not biblical grounds for remarriage. Yes, I experienced divorce before, but I was an unbeliever when that happened. Now I'm in Christ, old things have passed away, all things are new. Small problem, being an unbeliever is not a biblical grounds for divorce, therefore, it's not biblical grounds to allow for remarriage.

A lot of people have difficulty with that one but let me explain it to you this way. Imagine if you will that here today there's a couple, and the couple is here and the couple is having tremendous difficulty. God's been really working on them. They come today,

they're unbelievers and they get saved. They come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ right here today, radically saved, completely and utterly transformed. How many of you think that what we're supposed to do at that point is say, "Well, actually your marriage is null and void, your children are all illegitimate because you were unbelievers when you got married." Of course we're not going to say that. Why? Because we recognize the legitimacy of marriages even of unconverted men and women, therefore, the fact that someone was unconverted when they experienced the divorce is not biblical grounds for remarriage. And again, this is not our position, this is the two-clause position, and my point here is those individuals are saying, "Our position causes undue difficulty because you're going to have so much trouble with people who are in difficult situations that you're not going to allow of divorce or people who got out of difficult situations by divorce that you're not going to allow to remarry." And I'm saying even if we take their position, the two-clause position allowing for divorce and remarriage only for adultery, and only for the abandonment of a believer by an unbeliever, all of these issues are difficulties for them and probably a thousand other circumstances that we could come up with.

The only difference between the permanence view and the permissive view as it relates to difficulty in working it out in the church, is that we have two more difficulties that they don't. That's it. Thousands of possible difficulties over this issue. The only difference between the permanence view and the permissive view is that we just have two more difficulties, adultery and abandonment of an unbeliever. And for those who hold to the one-clause position who argue that 1 Corinthians 7, though it says the believer is not bound if an unbeliever leaves them, doesn't give permission for remarriage. For those individuals, we've only added one difficulty for our position and that's adultery. My spouse committed adultery. You mean to tell me that it's more difficult to look someone in the eye and say, "Your spouse committed adultery, but we still gotta hang in there and work through this," than it is to look at someone who says, "My spouse just got 100-year sentence and is offering me a divorce so I can continue with my life." You mean to tell me it's less difficult to look that person in the eye and say, "Sorry, it's not biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage." No, it's difficult.

It's difficult regardless of the position that you hold but it's still a moot point because we don't hold one position or another because of potential pastoral difficulties. Permanence view, here are the principles. 1. The one flesh union created in marriage is permanent until death. The one flesh union created in marriage is permanent until death. 2. Initiating the divorce is never lawful. Initiating a divorce is never lawful. 3. Remarriage after divorce is an act of adultery if a former spouse is living. Remarriage after a divorce is an act of adultery if a former spouse is living. These are the three points, these are the three principles and we'll look at these one at a time.

Let's look at the first one, the one flesh union created in marriage is permanent until death. Now think about this, usually we go to Matthew 19 and look for the exception clause but before you get to the exception clause, here's what happens, "And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, Is it lawful," not only why are they coming up to him testing him? Because in the Sermon on the Mount this is his third antithesis. So in

Matthew 5 Jesus preaches his coming out sermon and in his coming out sermon he addresses the issue of divorce and remarriage. So now the Pharisees are questioning him about a number of things that he's preached on, and he preached on this issue of divorce and remarriage. So they press him and they question him, but remember the first point: the one flesh union created in marriage is permanent until death. It's unbreakable. Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one wife for any cause?" Is there any circumstance under which it's lawful for a man to divorce his wife? He answered, "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."

Here's what I want you to understand: we usually go here and we look for the exception clause except for sexual immorality. Now there's an exception clause when we keep reading, we're going to look at the next part of this passage but here's what I want you to get and this is what we often miss: Jesus only gives the exception clause after he's asked another question. This question is asked and answered and there is no exception clause in it. Is it lawful for any cause for a man to divorce his wife? Jesus says, "No, not under any circumstance." No. Unequivocal. No, they two are one flesh. You can't undo that. It's like trying to separate a man from his heart. You can't do it. No. The question is asked and answered. There is no exception. Now, I know, I know, "Well, but wait a minute, if you keep reading there's the exception clause." Yes, but it's after another question. Don't miss this point. They ask him a question. He answers the question. He's finished answering the question. They ask him another question and we get an exception clause, okay? And we're going to deal with the issue of the exception clause in a moment. Mark 10:9, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." God joins individuals together in marriage. Man cannot unjoin what God has joined, okay?

The one flesh union created in marriage is permanent until death. By the way, that's why in our vows, what do we say? And here's why if I weren't a permanence view guy, I'd have to find a way to change wedding vows because the wedding vows are permanence view vows. For richer for poorer. In sickness and health. For better or worse. Let me ask you something: is adultery better or worse? It's worse and it's covered in the marriage vow. Forsaking all others. Until when? Until my partner doesn't do this. No, until we are parted by death. That's the marriage vow, folks. Here's what's interesting, the next antithesis that Jesus addresses in the Sermon on the Mount is vows, oaths. Isn't that interesting? Right after this he goes to the issue of oaths and vows and breaking oaths and breaking vows. We enter in the marriage through oaths and vows and the oaths and vows that we take are permanence oaths and vows we say only separated by death, forsaking all others forever and ever until one of us is no longer alive.

Next, initiating a divorce is never lawful. Initiating a divorce is never lawful. Look when he continues, "They said to him, 'Why then,'" remember this is the next question, okay? They asked him a question and he answered it. They go, "Okay, fine, you've got a problem with the case law. Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" 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 here's what's interesting: he says you're reading the case law wrong. They say, "Why did Moses command one to give her a certificate of divorce?" Did Moses command Israel to give certificates of divorce? No. He says when a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes and because he found insufficiency in her and writes her a certificate. Did he just make a command? The case law in Deuteronomy 24 is not about writing certificates of divorce, it's about remarriage. Moses assumes the issue of the certificates because that's something that was already happening in Israel. He's not writing about the certificate of divorce, he's writing about the issue of remarriage. He's saying, "You've sent your wife away. The marriage that she entered into was adulteress. She gets out of that one, you can't marry her again." Moses is making a statement about remarriage, he's not making a statement about divorce in Deuteronomy 24. That's not what the case law is covering. It's not covering the issue of divorce, it's covering the issue of remarriage. He's addressing the divorces that are now rampant among the people, and he's actually putting restrictions on the practice.

The Pharisees say, "Why did Moses command us to give?" Jesus says, "No, no, no, no. Moses did not command you to give her certificate of divorce. Because of the hardness of your hearts, he allowed that stuff to continue, but he addressed the issue of remarriage and I say to you whoever divorces his wife," then there's the exception clause, "causes her to commit adultery." By the way, that's what Moses says, "You caused her to commit adultery." Moses is not saying that it's lawful for you to divorce your wife. The Bible has never said that it's lawful for you to divorce your wife. Not one place in all of the Bible, Old Testament, New Testament, does it say that it's lawful for you to divorce your wife.

1 Corinthians 7:10 through 11, "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)," those are the only choices, "and the husband should not divorce his wife." Don't get divorced. That's what the Bible teaches. Don't get divorced. It is never lawful to pursue a divorce.

1 Corinthians 7:12-15, "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." Don't get divorced. "If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him." Don't get divorced. "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." It is never lawful to pursue a divorce. Never.

So this one flesh union creating marriage is permanent until death and initiating a divorce is never lawful. Thirdly, remarriage after divorce is an act of adultery if a former spouse is living. Look at Romans 7:2 through 3, and I want you to notice too, in none of these phrases, in none of these passages do we have anything resembling an exception clause. Only in Matthew do we have these exception clauses. That's important to hold onto.

Romans 7:2 and 3, "For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress." Only death. If there is remarriage under any circumstance while the previous spouse is alive, it is an act of adultery and notice that he always says it's an act of adultery because some people believe it is perpetual adultery forever. We'll get to that momentarily.

Mark 10:10 through 12, "And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 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.' " Notice no exception clause. Everyone who does this commits that. No exception. Whoever does this commits that No exception.

Luke 16 the other parallel, "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery." Again everyone.

And then our passage today, "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," there's the exception clause, "except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." Here's what I want you to see from the Matthew 5 passage, "But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife," then there's the exception clause, "except on the grounds of sexual immorality makes her commit adultery." What's this a statement about? If you're not divorcing her on those grounds, she made herself commit adultery. In other words, if she's committed this act, she's made herself an adulteress, you haven't made her an adulterous, but if you divorce her for some other reason, you've made her an adulterous when she goes and remarries. "Whoever marries a divorced woman," notice there's no exception clause here. "Whoever marries a divorced woman," he doesn't say, "unless her divorce was a lawful one." You notice that Jesus doesn't say that. There's no exception clause for the marriage to a divorced woman. None. Whoever marries a divorced woman for any reason, under any circumstance, again, as long as her previous spouse is still alive, it is an act of adultery.

There is no exception clause on this one which again raises questions about the exception clause on the first one. Let's look at the exception clause. 1. It's found only in Matthew's gospel, Matthew 5 and Matthew 19. Everywhere else, the statement about divorce and remarriage is unequivocal. There are no exceptions. Only here in Matthew 5 and in Matthew 19 do you have this clause, "except for the cause of sexual immorality." Most difficult passage on divorce and remarriage to interpret. There are seven different interpretations offered by commentators and scholars on the issue of the exception clause and what the exception clause refers to. By the way, five out of those seven don't allow for remarriage. Matthew used the term sexual immorality or porneia instead of the word for adultery. This is very important. Those people who believe that divorce and

remarriage is lawful, they argue that it's lawful in the case of adultery but that's not the word that Matthew uses. That's why all the interpreters say sexual immorality, unchastity, fornication, because the word that he uses is not the word for adultery. It's not the same term. Why doesn't he use the same term? Anyone who divorces his wife unless it's for the cause of adultery causes her to commit adultery. Does it make sense if adultery is the cause that would allow you to divorce and remarry that he would use the word for adultery and not the broader term porneia? Porneia is associated with Jewish betrothal law, not consummated marriage. The term that he uses there is a term used to refer to breaking a betrothal, not to breaking a consummated marriage.

Now you and I know nothing of this because we know nothing of betrothal. We, even if we use the word betrothal, we use the word to refer to people who are actually engaged to be married but if they break off the engagement it's no big deal. In Jewish culture, first century Jewish culture, the betrothal was actually a covenant. It was a legal binding document and in order for you to get out of the betrothal and not follow through with the marriage, you actually had to go before the authorities and demonstrate that there is proper reason for you not to follow through with your marriage contract. By the way, what would those reasons be? Those reasons would be things like we're too closely related, we just found that out. She's guilty of adultery. She's guilty of, you know, fornication. It would be Leviticus 18 stuff. Sexual immorality. So this word porneia that he chooses to use here is the word directly related to the issue of breaking a betrothal.

Now here's what's interesting: Matthew is the only one who has the exception clause. He's the only one who uses porneia as a reason that someone can put away a wife. He's also the gospel writer who wrote to a Jewish audience who would have known about the porneia clause, and he's the only one who mentions the fact that Joseph was going to put Mary away for what? Porneia. Joseph would have to have gotten a legal document in order to divorce Mary during their betrothal period because she was found to be with child. Matthew is the only one who mentions that speaking to his Jewish audience, and he's the only one who mentions the exception clause. Nobody else mentions it. Nobody else mentions it. I mean, if it's the crucial key to unlocking why a person could be allowed to divorce and remarry, don't you think that Mark would have mentioned it? That Luke would have mentioned it? That Paul would have mentioned it either in 1 Corinthians 7 or in Romans 7? But there is no mention of it anywhere else in the New Testament where divorce and remarriage are spoken of. Not once. And even in the places where Matthew uses it, it's only in the first half of the statement and not the second.

Again, the one flesh union created in marriage is permanent until death, initiating a divorce is never lawful, remarriage after a divorce is an act of adultery if a former spouse is living. We did this with the other passage listed with this one. Think about divorce and remarriage in the context of the biblical purposes for marriage: procreation, sanctification, illustration. Remember those? Those are the three purposes that God gave us marriage. Think about divorce and remarriage from the standpoint of procreation. Well, Malachi 2 where God says he hates divorce, he connects it directly to the issue of procreation. You've been faithless with the wife of your youth and what was God

seeking? He was seeking godly offspring. Procreation. God hates divorce for, among other things, interfering with the procreative purpose of marriage.

Second, sanctification. 1 Corinthians 7 we see that God gives us marriage for the purpose of sanctification, specifically that the desires that we have for physical intimacy can be fulfilled within the context of a God-ordained covenant marriage. The problem with divorce and remarriage is that it inevitably violates the sanctification purpose for marriage itself because doing so is an act of adultery.

And finally, illustration. Marriage is an illustration of the relationship between Christ and his church. Divorce and remarriage is a perversion of the picture of the relationship between Jesus and his bride whom he died for and would never ever ever divorce under any circumstance. It is unthinkable that Christ would divorce the bride for whom he died. Our marriages are living, breathing illustrations of the relationship between Christ and his church. It is unthinkable that in that context God would allow for divorce.

Remember this also, Jesus says your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. Okay, Hillel's school, you can divorce her for anything. She cooks a meal wrong. But look at this one, Shammai and his followers interpreted Deuteronomy 24 to refer to gross indecency, though not necessarily adultery.

So here's basically what Jesus is saying if we buy the exception clause not referring to the betrothal period but referring to actual marriage itself. Jesus says your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. Well, what about in the issue of divorce and remarriage? "Well, the Pharisees say you can divorce and remarry for gross immorality but I say to you the same thing." Huh? Yeah. If we interpret the exception clause as meaning that divorce and remarriage are allowable in circumstances of adultery, then basically Jesus has just said, "You've heard it said but I say to you exactly what the Pharisees say. I just told you that your righteousness has to exceed their righteousness but on this one they're right. You don't have to do any better than they do." It makes no sense whatsoever in the context of the Sermon on the Mount.

Pastoral implications. 1. We will always encourage you to stay married. Your elders here will always encourage you to stay married. In fact, when people come talking about the possibility of leaving their marriage and they want to come and give all the reasons why, you just might as well keep them to yourself because there's nothing you could say that would bring us to a place where we would encourage you to get a divorce. Nothing. Nothing. We will always encourage you to stay married, to keep your vows.

Secondly, we will always walk with you through difficult marriage situations with a view toward repentance and reconciliation. Always with a view toward repentance and reconciliation. Here's the other thing, you just think about this for a moment. We hold to the exception clause and we say that God allows for divorce and remarriage in the case of adultery. Now there are two people in the church, two couples in the church. Couple number one comes and says, "There's been adultery in our marriage, pastor. We need you to walk with us. We need you to pray with us. We need you to help us as we go through

the healing process and as God restores our marriage after this devastating experience of divorce." Another couple comes and says, "Hey, there's been divorce. We're checking out because we found a loophole in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19. We're done." You mean to tell me that we believe those two things are equally righteous because of a loophole? "There was adultery, says it right there, I can check out because of that. I'm gone and I'm completely righteous in being gone because the loophole is right there in the text." You can't get there from here folks. You can't get there from here. No, the picture we will always call you to paint is the picture of reconciliation, the picture of repentance.

We will not perform wedding ceremonies for those seeking a second marriage while the first spouse is living. We just can't do it. We can't do it. Go be reconciled. That's our only counsel, go be reconciled. "Well, I don't want to be reconciled." Well, okay, but go be reconciled. "But I don't feel like being reconciled." Go be reconciled, Sir, go love your wife. "No, I'm not going to go love my wife. I've divorced my wife." So what? The Bible commands you to love your wife. Go love your wife because you've been commanded to. "Well, she's not my wife anymore. I've divorced her." Well, fine, love your neighbor as yourself. Go love her because she's your neighbor. "She's not my neighbor anymore. I divorced her. She lives in a whole other state." Okay, well, fine, the Bible says that, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, that you have love one for another." Go love her because she's your sister in Christ. "Well, I don't even think she's saved." Fine, the Bible says love your enemies. Whichever reason you need, go and love her. "She's already married to somebody else." Then spend the rest of your life keeping your vow to her, even though she's gone and done that and carry with you for the rest of your days, if necessary, the testimony of having kept your vow even though she left you and went and married another. Honor Christ with that.

"Well, that's easy for you to say. You're 40 years old and have been married for 20 years. You know nothing about being alone." You know what, there's truth in that, but I would hope two things. 1. That we would not endeavor to say that only those who have experienced certain sins have the moral authority to speak to them. Or 2, pastors can't call people to hard things unless they've experienced the exact same hard things. Is that a hard thing? Yes, it is a hard thing. Is it fair? No way, no how. But it is a beautiful illustration of the relationship Christ has with his bride and that's what we're called to.

Does this mean that we ask people to stay in a situation and be beaten and brutalized and have their money spent recklessly and all? No, not at all. Not at all. We believe part of our pastoral responsibility in the midst of a situation like that would be to protect a person who was being abused but we still couldn't advise them to get a divorce because those are not biblical grounds, and that's whether we had a permanence view or not. We'll fight for every marriage no matter what. Well, here's what this does not mean: this does not mean that divorce and remarried people are committing new acts of adultery with every instance of marital intimacy. This does not mean that. The Bible clearly says that to do this, the act of divorcing and then the act of remarrying, is an act of adultery. What we don't see in any of those passages is that every act of intimacy thereafter is another fresh, new, guilt-laden act of adultery. No. It's not with the Bible teachers. It's not what we teach. This does not mean that divorced and remarried people are guilty of perpetual

polygamy or polyandry. Does not mean that. Polygamy, a man with multiple wives, polyandry, a woman with multiple husbands. Interesting in John 4, "Woman, where is your husband?" Well, I don't have a husband. "You've said well because you currently have five husbands because you've been divorced and remarried and you're still married to all of it." No. Jesus says "you have had five husbands." He does not say she's guilty of polyandry, of multiple continual marriages. He doesn't say that.

This does not mean that divorced and remarried people should divorce their current spouse and return to their previous one. Some people teach this. Your divorce and your remarriage was an act of adultery, well, you need to get divorced. No. No. You don't recommit a sin in order to demonstrate your repentance for the first time you did it. Amen? Now do you know the most important thing divorced and remarried people can do? Grab a hold of the permanence view and don't let go. Confess your sin for what happened before but look your spouse in the eye and say, "I know my previous track record says to you that I'll leave you if you don't live up to what I consider your end of the bargain, but I don't believe that. It was wrong when I did it before. It would be wrong if I did it now. I will not under any circumstances do that again. It is impermissible. I do not believe in it." Homicide, maybe, divorce never.

Again, I really believe oftentimes divorced and remarried people when they hear a message like this, if they don't persist and they don't press through, all you leave with is just sort of guilt and condemnation and, you know, all these other sorts of things and we miss the point. If divorced and remarried people try to hold on desperately to their righteousness in spite of what happened to them previously, what they're saying to their current spouse is, "Under the right situations I'd leave you too. I was completely just in what I did and if you put me in the same situation, I'm out of here." That's what you're saying. That's what you're saying. Don't say that to your current spouse. Say to them, "It was sinful when it happened before. I am broken over and crushed over my sin. And because I recognize that it was wrong and that it was sin, hear me when I say to you, never under any circumstances will I violate my oath and my vow to you. I meant what I said when I said till death do us part."

Finally, this does not mean that divorced and remarried people are second-class citizens in the kingdom of God. They are not. And this is one thing that saddens me about the way people view our position on the issue of divorce and remarriage. "Oh, well, then you think divorced and remarried people are second-class citizens." Absolutely not because here's the other thing, remember between us and a two-clause person who believes it's okay for adultery, and it's okay for abandonment of a believing spouse by the living spouse, the only difference between us is two circumstances. Out of the thousands of possible circumstances, there are two under which there's difference, and you say to me those two make us evil people who think that all divorced people are second-class citizens? Come on now. Come on. That's not the case.

Let me say this to you, we end where we began: divorce and remarriage is not a sin that Jesus forgot to pay for on the cross. Amen? It's not. It's not the end of the world for the individual who's experienced it. Hear this also: just because it's not the end of the world

for the individual who's experienced it, doesn't mean that we can have this attitude, "Well, since it's forgivable and I'm really unhappy, let's go ahead and do it and then I'll be..." No. Don't you mess with God like that. Don't you dare mess with God like that because you know better. You mean you're going to sit there and know that it's sin and presume upon the grace of God and do it just because you know it? It's like one of your kids coming in your face saying, "Hey, you know what? I know that you're against me having the keys to the car right now, but I also know that you are my father and you have to forgive me. So because I want the car real bad right now even though you've said no, I'm getting ready to go out here and get it. You just sit here and when I get back we'll make this all right." Don't you dare presume upon God's grace like that.

When it comes to marriage, we're in it to win it, amen? Those of you who know me, you know that just about every place I go when I talk about this issue of marriage and divorce and remarriage, I always say this phrase that my kids get sick of hearing and I'm so happy that they get sick of hearing it, that means I'm almost saying it enough. I tell my wife all the time, "If you leave me, I'm going with you." It's not an option, people.

Here's the other thing that you need to understand: marriage is not difficult because of the person you happen to be married to. Let me let you in on a little secret: you're the problem. Can't say amen you ought to say ouch. You're the problem. "Yeah, well you don't know my spouse." So? You're the problem. You are. "Well yeah, they have problems too." Yeah, they do but that's irrelevant. You're the problem, and if you leave this marriage and go and get into another one, guess what you take with you? You who happened to be the problem. There's not some green pasture out there called a marriage beyond difficulty and without conflict. If you could be a fly on the wall in every home in this church you would discover things in every home represented in this church that at one moment or another apart from the grace of God could lead to Splitsville. And if you've never gotten that frustrated in marriage, you're not doing it right.

That's what happens when two broken sinful creatures come together and say, "I do." There's a synergy there, and we multiply our brokenness and multiply our sinfulness. But here's the good news: there's also a synergy wherein we multiply our ability to overcome by the grace of God that abides within us. Now instead of one broken sinful individual who's walking out this Christian life with the power that raised Christ from the dead and me, there is another broken sinful individual with the power that raised Christ from the dead in them as well and God has made the two into one and he's given us the unbelievable privilege of representing before a lost and hurting and dying world this relationship between Jesus Christ and his church and it is awesome in the true sense of the word. We are absolutely not up to the job but, praise God, he is able.

And here's what I want you to see: am I most like Christ when my bride is meeting all of my needs and satisfying all of my desires and I am really not having to do much sacrificing or enduring at all? Or am I more like Christ on the hard days when I'm having to dig deep? Those are the days when I realize how utterly dependent I am on the power of Christ to do and be what he's called me to do and be, especially when I realize that the overwhelming majority of the times when I'm having difficulty with my own failures

bearing fruit. Amen, somebody. Hang in there. By the power of Christ, hang in there. After all, I believe every last one of us when it comes to our children are a lot more prone to sit down and talk to them about the permanence view when we talk to them about their marriage. None of us sits there and goes, "Hey, if it doesn't work out, you can always just go do it again." That's not our attitude nor should it be. Those of us who have experienced the pain of divorce and remarriage, embrace the grace of God and his forgiveness and the wholeness that he brings. Those of us who have not experienced the pain of divorce and remarriage, don't think so highly of yourself just because you haven't followed through on what you've wanted on a number of occasions. We are no better, we've just been spared and it's the grace of God that has spared us.