

THE MARRIAGE DEBATE
Mark 10:1-12

Before I read, we will pray. Please join me in prayer. O Lord, our God and Father in heaven, we come before you now unto the time of the opening of your word and the teaching from your word. I pray, O Lord, that you would help me as I speak. I pray, O Lord, that you would help us all as we hear. Lord, give us eyes to see, give us ears to hear, give us hearts to understand and to obey.

O Lord, we thank you for your word. Your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. May it be the very foundation of our lives. May it be buried deep in our hearts. May it, O Lord, be the controlling factor in all of our thoughts. May all of our thoughts be brought into submission to Christ through the power and the work of your word by the Holy Spirit. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Our reading then is Mark in chapter 10, and we'll be reading from verses 1 to 12. Mark chapter 10, verses 1 to 12:

¹ 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.

² And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" ³ He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" ⁴ They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." ⁵ And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. ⁶ But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' ⁷ 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, ⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. ⁹ What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

¹⁰ And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹ And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, ¹² and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

Amen. May God bless that word to us.

Well, if you were to look at the history of World War II, a very shallow and foolish conclusion would be that World War II was caused by the Nazi invasion of Poland. In the scheme of things, the way history unfolded, the Nazis invaded Poland, and as a result, the British and the French declared war on Nazi Germany. But that wasn't the cause of World War II. That was the starting point.

I've given this sermon the title, "The Marriage Debate," and a surface reading of the text which you have just heard tells you that, clearly, under discussion here is the subject of marriage and divorce. But, by implication, there's a lot more than what's on the surface. This goes very deep, this passage.

As usual, Mark has packed an awful lot into the implications of his text. Two of those major implications are the role and the use of Scripture; the way our Lord and Savior Himself uses Scripture—the inerrancy, the sufficiency, the infallibility. All of those big words—words like *analogia scriptura*: Scripture explaining Scripture; words like *sola scriptura*: Scripture alone—they all come out in implication from this text. When Jesus was confronted with a problem, He answered that problem, or He answered that query, from Scripture. He used Scripture as His last and final word. Because the Bible said it, as far as Jesus was concerned, because the Bible said it, therefore, that is sufficient. Therefore, God has spoken. Therefore, man ought to listen. Because the Bible said it, that’s the way that it is.

The second implication that comes out of it, clearly, is that the Creator of heaven and earth Himself, the one in whose image people were made, has set the definition of marriage. He set the definition of marriage, He has defined marriage, He has told us what marriage is, He has told us basically how marriage is to work—the God of heaven, the Creator Himself. Remember that Scripture tells us that “all things were created through Him, and without Him was not anything created that was created.” That’s speaking of Jesus—the Word—at the start of the gospel of John. The Creator Himself has spoken

I’ve seen, and I’m sure some of you have seen, things that are called “memes,” that move around the Internet, and there’s one that does the rounds, or there’s different pictures, different things, but they keep doing the rounds. “What did Jesus say about homosexuality?” “Oh, nothing.” No, I’m sorry. That is so foolish that it is deliberately ignorant. And if it’s deliberately ignorant, well then according to Scripture, it’s utter stupidity and rebellion against God.

When Jesus said “male and female, God created them,” and “what God has put together, let not man tear apart,” He was speaking to the subject, because He gave the right. Therefore, any variation from the right must be the wrong. If someone tells you that two plus two equals five, you say, “I don’t know what planet you came from. Two plus two is four.”

Anyone that tries to tell us that marriage can take on any form or pattern, apart from what Scripture has dictated, is trying to tell us that two plus two equals five, or some other foolish idea; some other foolish metaphor for it.

Let’s get into the text. I want to move fairly quickly through the text, then I want to work over those two major implications: The role of Scripture and God speaking of marriage. So let’s look at the text, then. Starting at verse 1. We just get given the setting, “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.”

Once again in Mark, we get told that Jesus teaches. I think as far as Mark is concerned, apart from the cross itself, the most important thing that Jesus did was teach. Again and again and again, He taught them. And if ever Mark mentions miracles and healings, they’re always subsidiary to teaching. It’s the teaching of the word, it’s the spreading of the gospel, it’s the declaration of God’s truth that Mark wants us to pay attention to, and Jesus is here teaching. Listen to the teaching. Pay attention to the teaching. That’s what we’re being told.

Verse 2: “And Pharisees came up and in order to test him”—and it’s worth stopping there at that one word, “testing,” “peirázō.” In Greek in Mark it only gets used four times—three times of the Pharisees, one of Satan. The first use in Mark is Satan. It was Satan who tested Jesus, or tempted Jesus when Jesus went into the wilderness. Mark is saying what’s happening. Think about this. When he only uses that word on particular occasions, he’s telling us what’s behind this testing. He’s telling us what’s behind this trial, or this tempting. He’s telling us it’s the Devil himself—that the Pharisees are working not for God. They claim to be worshiping the living God, but they’re not doing the works of God, they’re working for the one who tests and tempts. They’re working for the Devil.

And they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” It might seem a reasonable question. You might think that perhaps they just wanted some clarification, but it’s a loaded question. The idea that it’s just a question seeking clarification is kind of like the idea that World War II started because the Nazis invaded Poland. There was a whole lot more than that involved in getting World War II up and running. It’s a loaded question.

The important thing about the location that Mark has given us in verse 1 is that Jesus is back again in the territory of Herod Antipas, and Herod Antipas was the one who had John the Baptist beheaded, and John the Baptist was the one who, in his preaching and teaching, was rebuking Herod and his wife for divorcing their partners. He was rebuking them for having an unclean life, for living a life of wickedness—marital wickedness. There are three reasons why this is a loaded question, and that’s the first one. He’s in the danger zone, if you want to think of it that way. The teaching on divorce had already cost someone their head; it had already cost John the Baptist his head. And now Jesus is being asked this loaded question.

Also, loading up the question, is a division amongst the Pharisees themselves. They had two leading and very well-respected rabbis, Hillel and Shammai. Hillel taught that divorce was to be allowed for any reason. If the husband was so much as unhappy with his wife’s cooking, he could divorce her. If he felt that she was in any way embarrassing socially, he could divorce her. Whereas Shammai taught that divorce was only allowed under the circumstances of adultery. So you’ve got a conservative, if you like, and a freewheeler, or a liberal.

So, Take your side, Jesus. Take a side out here in Herod’s territory. Take a side out here on a subject that’s already cost John the Baptist his head. Take a side. Who are you with? Are you with Hillel or are you with Shammai? You see, it’s a loaded question. There’s a lot more going on behind it.

The funny thing is that it appears to me that Jesus immediately turns their testing back upon their own heads. They came to test Jesus. They got one question in. The testing then starts to come from Jesus to all those who listen. Jesus starts to speak, and He asks the question, verse 3. “He answered them, ‘What did Moses command you?’” What did Moses command you?

Let’s have a look at what Jesus would have been referring to. Turn back to Deuteronomy, chapter 24. Deuteronomy, chapter 24, just looking at the first four verses: “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, ² and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, ³ 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, ⁴ 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."

You can see, then, that in the law in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses regulates divorce. It's a formal process. It actually protects in many cases the victim, who is the woman herself. The certificate in Jewish tradition was required to actually give a reason for the divorce, and the certificate actually, in Jewish tradition, exempted her from being persecuted for remarrying, for taking up another husband. It was given as a limitation. It was not given as an insurance policy. Get married, say you're going to be together forever, say you love her, but if you don't like her, drop-kick out the door. It wasn't given as an insurance policy. And the phrase in the term, "if he finds any indecency in her," was always considered to mean adultery. But that rabbi Hillel, who says, "No, no, It's divorce for any reason"—he stepped back from what was always considered to be the traditional interpretation, and he allowed, as we've already seen, many other reasons—any reason you like—for divorcing a woman.

Back into the gospel of Mark, verse 4. So Jesus asked the question, and He was alluding to that passage that we just read. "⁴They said, 'Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.'" Notice they didn't give any reasoning. They've given the bare minimum. "Moses allowed." "⁵And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.'" Because of your hardness of heart He wrote you this commandment.

In other words, Moses, realizing that he was leading a sinful people, and under the inspiration and the influence of the Holy Spirit, regulated and limited the evil that could be done. He regulated and limited the evil. God restrains evil. Understand that—God restrains evil. If you, like me, are convinced that our nation seems to be given over increasingly to wickedness, understand, the wickedness that you see is not the wickedness that is going to cause the judgment of God. The wickedness that you see *is* the judgment of God, being enacted upon our nation.

It is God who has withdrawn His restraining hand. It is God who has allowed this sinful, vile, madness to come to the fore. It is God's judgment. That's why we must be praying for our nation. We must be praying that God would restrain the wickedness and the evil of our nation, even of the unbelievers. We must be praying for our country. Wickedness, even wickedness, is controlled by the work of God.

"Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment." Moses was restraining the wickedness. He was restraining through the law the wickedness, or the sinfulness, or the hardness of heart of the people of Israel. He was putting a limit on it. Marriage was going to collapse at times, and it was accepted. It was actually accepted that adultery destroys marriage. It was accepted that adultery does destroy the covenant of marriage.

Moses made allowance for divorce, but that doesn't mean he commanded it. It doesn't mean he said it was good thing. It doesn't mean he said it should happen. He was restraining, he was putting it within boundaries. He was stopping the abuse of women—just kicking them out, drop-kicking them. They come in, you take their dowry, and then you've got their stuff, you could divorce them, you kick them out, you've still got their stuff. They've got nothing, and they become a burden to their parents, or their parents will disown them anyway. He's restraining that wickedness.

Now let's see what Jesus has to say, verse 6: "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'" Stop there. I remind you once again who's speaking. Who's speaking? God, the Son of God is speaking. The one who created them male and female to bear His image is the one who is speaking. It's His image that they were originally made in, and it's His image that those who are regenerate and reborn again are born into—the image of Jesus Christ. The one who is speaking is the one who gave the law. The one who's speaking is the one who gave the Scriptures. The one who's speaking is the one who created. You listen when He speaks, and you listen to what He says. And when He says that one plus one equals two, it equals two. That's it. That's who's spoken

⁷ "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife," He's quoting from Genesis, as we read before. ⁸ "and the two shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two but one flesh." We need to think a little about that idea of one flesh. It's a complicated idea. It's possible to make too little of it, it's possible to make too much of it, but let's try and get it right.

What does God mean when He says that "the two shall become one flesh"? Remember as we read from Ephesians also earlier, that Paul speaks of the marriage relationship being illustrative of the gospel, being illustrative of heavenly things. Well, in a way, we get ourselves at least some kind of illustration of Trinitarian relationships, of the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: one essence, one being, but different persons. Three different persons being one God; three different persons sharing one essential essence or being.

A husband and a wife are two persons, but upon entering into the marriage vow, they are joined in the eyes of God and are seen to be one person; they're seen to be *one* person. Now our essential existence as people is in the body. We were created physical beings. And so we are two people in marriage of one body, one flesh. So we're getting a little bit of gospel illustration here from marriage. We're joined, not just by vows, and we're joined, not just physically, we're joined in a spiritual sense. We're joined at the soul.

Now when I said it's possible to make too much of this, why did I say that? Because there is cultish teaching going around about the idea of people having become one with a whole number of different people, and needing deliverance from being one with other people. If for example a person before marriage had had multiple partners, the cultish teaching is that those multiple partners from before marriage, they're one with all of them. Somehow or other, you've got six, seven, eight, nine people being one flesh. That's going too far. The covenant relationship was not established simply because sinners slept together. The covenant relationship is established

by a covenant. Marriage is a covenant relationship. Vows are exchanged in the presence of God and before many witnesses, and it's understood from Scripture.

Perhaps if we wanted to have complete marriage vows, we should be reading the penalties for breaking the vows, and that would make it more like an Old Testament covenant enactment. We don't. No one thinks they're going to break marriage vows on the day they get married, obviously. But when the covenant is enacted and when the covenant is consummated in marriage, God declares that the two are one. The joining of two sinners, whilst it's sin, whilst it's wickedness, whilst it's just another expression of evil, is not in and of itself a covenant of marriage. A person cannot be one flesh with every person that they've ever had any enacting with or any interaction with in their previous life. Born again, regenerate in Christ, one flesh with our spouse. That's it. One flesh.

And when I say it can be made too little of, I have also read teaching trying to go against that teaching of being one flesh with six, seven, eight, or nine people, for example, where they try to say that marriage is in and of itself only a physical relationship, it's only just a contractual relationship, there is nothing spiritual about it. No, that's going too far back the other way. There is a one-flesh relationship between a husband and a wife who are married and covenanted in the sight of God. They may not be believers, but if they have married and covenanted in the sight of God, they are one flesh. The two have become one.

The Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Creator of people, the Creator of man and woman, has not here said that anyone, apart from a man and a woman, can enter into a one-flesh relationship. He has told us that one plus one equals two. Therefore, one plus one equals two. Man, woman, one flesh. That's it. You can't change any of the ingredients. You can't change any of the denominators in that one plus one equals two example. Man plus woman, covenanted with God, equals one flesh.

A man and a man cannot be married and in covenant under the sight of God. There may be legislators in the world who are stupid enough to pretend that such a thing can be called marriage. It's not marriage. A woman and a woman cannot be joined one flesh in covenant before God. Once again, as I said, there may be people in the world who are stupid enough to call such thing a marriage. It cannot be a marriage. The Creator of heaven and earth, the Creator of all humanity, the one in whose image we are made, has just here given us exactly what marriage is—a man and a woman, and the two shall become one flesh.

Let's go on, then. Verse 8: “⁸ ‘and the two shall become one flesh.’” So they are no longer two but one flesh. “⁹ What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” Well, what therefore God has joined together, let not separate. Who joined us together, then? God. Each and every marriage, each and every true covenant marriage, each and every true one-flesh union, has been put together by God. God defines marriage. He has put us together, those of us who have a husband or a wife, those of us who have a marriage partner. It's God who's drawn us together, and it's God who's joined us and given us one-flesh union.

Now if it's God who put together that marriage, ask another question. God who established them male and female at the beginning, would He break His own creation law? Would God put

together man and man and call it marriage? Would God put together woman and woman and call it marriage? Or would God put together three women and call that marriage, and all the other crazy and stupid, rebellious expressions of sin and wickedness that are being called “marriage” in this day around the world? They have not been put together in a covenant relationship by God. They have not. Full stop.

God created us, He lays down the rules, He has told us the way it is. That’s it. It doesn’t matter if you disagree or agree. When God in heaven says that’s the way it is, that’s the way it is. Rebel and sin all you like. Say that you want it to be something different. He’s God. He doesn’t care. He’s not changing His mind. He’s not dropping it. “Ah, you know, I really didn’t think that through, did I?”—these thoughts are not running through the mind of God. He set this up. He drew it together. He invented man and woman. He invented the one-flesh relationship. He has said that a husband and wife joined together in the covenant of marriage is a mystery that demonstrates the gospel—that demonstrates the gospel. He has said it; therefore, that’s the way it is, and our rebellion is nothing but foolishness, and the rebellion of our society is nothing but legislated foolishness.

Continuing to read, verse 10: “And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter.” I did want to point out that in the equivalent passage in Matthew chapter 19, when it tells us what the disciples asked, it seems that they were stunned. It seems that they were stunned, because they said, “If this is the truth, it’s better for a man not to marry.” So unfortunately, the teaching of the world and the thoughts and the ways of the world invade the minds of Christians. We hear all this stuff, and many are influenced and swayed by it. We are influenced and swayed by it. They hear all this stuff. Here were those guys who were the disciples, and they were thinking, “Well, if everything gets too bad with my wife, I can drop-kick her, I can get rid of her, give her the punt.” And Jesus has just told them, “No. Your wife is your wife for your life. That’s the way it’s going to be, fellows.” It’s interesting, that.

And it’s also interesting, as we’ve already mentioned, that in Matthew chapter 19, it’s recorded that Jesus gave the only exception clause: adultery. Adultery was the only thing that broke the one-flesh relationship, the only thing that legitimized divorce. Once again, the Christian life, the life of holiness, the life of righteousness, the life of walking in the Way, has to be lived out. You can’t go around saying, “Oh yes, I believe in Jesus,” and live like a devil. You can’t go around, “Oh yes, I believe in Jesus,” and that belief in Jesus not transforming your life and the way you do things. We must live out our Christian life as God has ordained and commanded in His word—in holiness and in righteousness.

God hates divorce. Have a quick look at the book of Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament. Malachi chapter 2. I once made an enemy for life with this passage, I’ll tell you now. The lady in question was Pentecostal. She had three children and they were multiple divorcees. They all claimed to be Christians, and she was trying to tell me that every divorce was God’s will; that God had allowed every divorce because each of them was to move on to a better partner, and that she had that as a word from the Lord. This is what she was telling me. I was young, I was not very diplomatic, and I said, “No, Scripture tells me that God hates divorce.” And I directed her to Malachi in chapter 2. Scripture tells me that God hates divorce.

Every divorce is a sin. As I said, I made an enemy for life. Perhaps not for life. Perhaps she's grown up a little bit. She really, really didn't like me from that day forward.

Malachi chapter 2. Let's read from verses 13 to verse 16. The Lord is addressing the nation of Israel, and the whole story has been set up in question and answer format. The nation has been asking God, "Where are all the blessings?" And God has been giving them His answer: "Why do you expect the blessings when you sin against me?" And here's one of those sins, starting at verse 13 of chapter 2:

¹³ And this second thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. ¹⁴ But you say, 'Why does he not?' Because the LORD was witness"—the Lord Himself, understand that—"was witness between you and the wife of your youth." Where does Jesus get the idea that God puts a man and a woman together? "Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. ¹⁵ Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union?" A portion of the Holy Spirit. There's something spiritual in a one-flesh relationship. There's something of the Holy Spirit of God in a marriage relationship.

"And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. ¹⁶ For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless." The Lord hates divorce. He hates it. He's a witness to marriage. It is God who draws together a man and a woman into the covenant and the bond of marriage, and it is God who sets up the law of marriage, and He hates divorce. He hates it.

Turning back to the gospel of Mark. I'll just draw one more implication from this passage, and that is, note—and it really did stun the people there, I think. We come to the conclusion of it, verse 11: "And Jesus said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her.'" And stop there. That's the stunning bit of news for the disciples, because the practice of Jewish law at that time was that you could only commit adultery against the man; it wasn't against the woman. Take another husband's wife, they were teaching you had not sinned against the woman, you'd sinned against the man. In other words, the woman was just a second-class citizen, anyway.

And in this parallel, Jesus elevates the person of the woman to the same level as the person of the man. Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against *her*. "¹² And if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery," and we could say, against *him*. In other words, He's granted equality of status, equality of personage. A man and a woman are both people in the image and the likeness of God. Married, they are even more in the image and the likeness of God. In the covenant of marriage, they are even more in the image and likeness of God. As Paul said, that is a great mystery. A man and a woman both stand before God as bearers of His image. Regardless of the roles that He assigns to us in life, each and every one of us, from the smallest to the greatest, we are people bearing the image of God, before God and before Christ.

Let's leave that exact passage there, and let's work out two major implications from this passage. First of all, as I've said, we're looking at the role and the use of Scripture, and how Jesus Himself looked at Scripture. He saw Scripture as the final authority; the final authority and decisive.

Furthermore, Jesus here, as He does in other places, not only sees Scripture as the final authority, He sees it as the truth. He's spoken of the Genesis creation account. He's spoken of two people created in the image of God. He has spoken of Adam and Eve, and He has spoken of them as real people, who really existed, who really stand at the head of the human race. He has spoken of these as being God's revealed truth.

I don't trust people who think that they're better at interpreting Scripture and the world around us than Jesus was. I don't. I'm not inclined to trust teachers who don't hold to inerrancy and don't hold to infallibility and don't hold to the fact that Jesus Himself believed in creation. He not only believed in creation, He believed in the Flood. He spoke of Noah and his family. "As it was in the days of Noah," from Luke chapter 17. And He believed in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. He spoke of Lot being rescued—"as in the days of Lot."

Jesus believed that the book of Genesis is true; that it is Scripture; that it is laying the foundation for all understanding of Scripture; that if you find it in the book of Genesis, it's no less Scripture than if we find it in any book in the New Testament; that if there is something given as a fact in the Old Testament, it's a fact.

How can we uphold Jesus as the sinless, spotless, Lamb of God, and at the same time say that Scripture is not Scripture, when Jesus Himself considered Scripture to be the infallible word of God? Jesus quotes from the Psalms. In Mark chapter 12, He quotes from Psalm 110. In John chapter 10, He quotes from Psalm 82. And it's very interesting, in John chapter 10, He finishes His quotation off with the words, "and Scripture cannot be broken." And they're the words of Jesus Christ the Savior. He said that. I don't need to say anymore, do I? Jesus said that, and Scripture cannot be broken.

Do we truly love Him? Do we truly worship Him? Do we truly believe the things we say about Him when He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life"? Do we truly hold to that? If we do, what right have we to claim that we understand history better than He does, and that our wisdom is sufficient to decide what is and what isn't Scripture? Understand, we don't judge Scripture, Scripture judges us. We don't decide which page is better than the other page. God has given us the whole book—Genesis to Revelation. It's the word of God. And we're to listen to the word of God, just as Adam was to listen to the word of God: "Do not eat of the tree in the middle of the garden. On the day that you eat of it, dying you shall surely die." He was given a word from God. He was instructed to listen to and remember that word and to obey it. So are we.

Jesus quoted from the prophet Daniel. He alluded to the prophet Isaiah. The law, the prophets, the Psalms, all of the Old Testament—Jesus put His trust in the word. It seems to me to be fairly obvious and undeniable that having done so, He expects us, His people, to do the same. He interprets Scripture with Scripture—*analogia scriptura*. He considers Scripture to be the final

word—sola scriptura. He doesn't consider it to be full of errors. He sees it as inerrant. He doesn't see it to be fallible. He sees it to be infallible. All of these big words all carry meaning, and we use and express these. We use these words to try and define how we see Scripture, because we understand and we realize that there are those who disagree with us, and we're in the situation of having to disagree with them—having to be able to answer them. And the strongest answer with regards to Scripture is that Jesus Himself considered Scripture to be the infallible word of God—the inerrant word of God, the final command or word for faith and practice.

In John chapter 17 and verse 17, Jesus said, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” Bury your head in Scripture; bury Scripture in your heart. God by His Holy Spirit will do the work of sanctification. God will empower by His Holy Spirit the believer to overcome the sin that remains in our lives and in our flesh. And we will be sanctified. We will eventually be presented before our Savior as a bride without blemish, clothed in white, without spot. What a picture, what a day! It'll come through the word. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

Let's go on then to the clear implication. I've already spoken a lot about it. God has defined marriage. He's done it clearly, He's done it without question, He's done it without quibble. There's no escaping from this, there's no running away from it. This is what He said it is. That's it.

I'm going to finish off with these thoughts. I want you to turn to First John chapter 5. The epistle of First John, towards the back of your Bible, chapter 5, and we'll have a look at verses 16 and 17 “¹⁶If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life.” So what's that about? That's about interceding for Christians who are struggling and fighting temptation. “—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death.” Here's the scary part. “There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. ¹⁷All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.”

But look at what he said: “There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.” Anyone who reads that asks the question, “Well, what is the sin that leads to death?” Well, John doesn't specifically and particularly and clearly define it. In the context of First John, the sin that leads to death would be the sin of teaching things that are wrong about the Lord Jesus Christ. In First John, he is very worried about Christology. He's very worried that we understand that Jesus came into the world, was truly a man and truly God. He was both divine and human. John was speaking about false teachers—anyone who denies that Jesus did not come in the flesh, for example, or denies that he who does not have the Son does not have the Father. So in the context of First John, we could say a sin that leads to death would be false teaching; someone who is leading people away from the true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But I think because John has not specifically and particularly defined it, he's leaving it open for us to think about it, and to come to some other conclusions. So I want to come to some conclusions, and I want to think about the sin of church leaders teaching that there is such a thing as homosexual marriage; the sin of church leaders teaching that there is such a thing as a practicing homosexual Christian; the sin of church leaders teaching that homosexuality is acceptable in the eyes of God. And I want to leave you with the question: Being that kind of teacher, have they committed the sin that leads to death?

If you, as a teacher, teach that in the eyes of God there is such a thing as homosexual marriage; if you, as a teacher, teach that in the eyes of God homosexuality is not a sin; and if you as a teacher, teach that a person who is a practicing homosexual can be a full-blooded member of a church and not be sinning against God, let's draw out some implications of that teaching.

As far as I'm concerned, the very first thing that destroys is the doctrine of Scripture, that doctrine that we've been talking about, that doctrine of the word being God's given word. In the Old Testament, we've got Genesis chapter 19, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah—God enacting judgment before people, before the eyes of the people, upon a city that had been given over to homosexual lust.

You've got Leviticus chapter 18 and Leviticus chapter 20, where homosexuality, both male and female, is clearly, specifically, and particularly forbidden—an abomination in the sight of God. It's called "an abomination." God finds such things abominable.

In the New Testament, Romans chapter 1, verses 26 to 29. It speaks of God giving unbelievers over to their lust. Because they knew from creation itself that there is a God who created, and in that creation He established an order, and they refused to acknowledge that bare minimum of revelation. Their eyes were blinded, their hearts were hardened, and they were given over to indecent and unclean lusts. They were given over, men lusting for men, women lusting for women. It's forbidden.

I want us to have a look at this one, First Corinthians chapter 6. If you'll turn to First Corinthians chapter 6. We'll read from verse 9 to verse 11 of chapter 6: "9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality"—I'll stop and add a little comment to that. The ESV says, "nor men who practice homosexuality." In the Greek behind it, it's very clear, it's very particular, that it's both the giver and the receiver. The Greeks had different words. The one who submits and the one who gives, both are described. "Nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such"—and please give some emphasis on this word "*were*"—past tense—"And such *were* some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Were—"You *were*." Homosexuality is a sin. It's clearly a sin, Old Testament through the New. You can play all the linguistic games you want, and I know that there's plenty out there doing it and writing their books and saying they've found this dodgy little interpretation of a certain word somewhere, in some ancient document, and maybe, you know, we with our modern ideas and our modern way of interpreting, maybe we know a little bit more than God. It's rubbish. It's just rubbish and it's nonsense. It's drivel. It's a sin.

So to say that homosexuality is not a sin, in the first instance, destroys the doctrine of Scripture. Tear your Bible up, put it in the fireplace. You might as well get a bit of heat from it, because you're going to get nothing else from it, because it doesn't mean what it says and its not

accurate. So the first doctrine that one who teaches these things is destroying is the doctrine of Scripture.

The second thing they're doing is destroying the doctrine of God. This is an assault against the very doctrine of God—the immutability of God, the unchangeableness of God. If God 4,000 years ago said that homosexuality is a sin, God, who does not change, still sees homosexuality as a sin. If you are teaching someone that homosexuality is not a sin, you are saying that God changes. And if God changes, I'm telling you now, you've got no grounds, no basis, for the assurance of salvation.

Numbers 23:19 reads, “God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind.” God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Malachi 3:6 says, “for I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.” For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O Jacob, are not consumed.

What's that saying? What are we to get from that? The God who makes promises to His people, because He is God, keeps His promises because He does not change His mind, because He is not capricious, because He doesn't change for anyone. He is God. What can God not do? The only thing He can't do is cease being God. He is God. He has promised, and we put our faith and our trust in God, trusting that He won't change His mind. He said He loved us; therefore, He loves us. And He loves us with an eternal love. Our names are written into the book of life, before the foundation of the world. And that love is eternal.

What God says, God means, and God does not change. To say that homosexuality is not a sin is to say that God has changed, that that which used to be an abomination in His eyes no longer is; that that which used to be a sin, excluding one from fellowship, no longer is. If that's changed, He's changed. If He's changed, who do we believe in and why do we believe? So, doctrine of Scripture; doctrine of God, particularly, the doctrine of immutability.

How about the doctrine of sin? For someone to receive the good news of the gospel, they have to receive the bad news. They have to receive the bad news. A person does not become a Christian without being convicted of their sinfulness and their need for salvation. We must be convicted, and we must be convicted that we are wicked in the eyes of God. No one turns to the Savior, no one thinks they need salvation unless they understand they're sinners. And God has defined sin in His word. Sure, you can pretend there's no sin. You take away the bad news, therefore, you've taken away the good news. You don't have the gospel.

Paul says in Acts 17:30 that God has commanded men everywhere to repent. When John the Baptist commences preaching, he preached, “Repent!” When Jesus commenced preaching, He preached, “Repent! Repent, for the kingdom of God is near.” Sin is sin. You take away the doctrine of sin, you've taken away the gospel.

The next one: the doctrine of regeneration—the doctrine of being born again. This is what those who call themselves homosexual Christians cannot hear, and they will not hear. They cannot and will not hear that a born-again person has the very foundations of their desires changed. I'm not saying that a born-again person no longer feels temptation to fall back into the old sinful

patterns. We all know how temptation works. That's the sad fact of life. But we have different desires. Having been regenerated, having been renewed, we see sin for what it is, and we do not want to be guilty of sin. We want to be holy. We want to be Christ-like. We no longer have a desire to celebrate and practice our sinfulness.

In that reading from First Corinthians, where did I put all the weight? "And such *were* some of you. And such *were* some of you." They were sexually immoral, they were practicing homosexuals, they were idolaters. Such will not inherit the kingdom of God. *Were*. Why is that they *were* and no longer are? Because they're born again. They're born again. So this teaching that you can be a practicing homosexual and a Christian denies the doctrine of regeneration.

Finally, it simply denies and destroys all objective standards of holiness. It denies and destroys all objective standards of holiness. First Peter 1:16 reads, "Be ye holy as I am holy," says the Lord. Be ye holy, be ye Christ-like, be ye godly. As God is, so we should be.

All of these things are just gone. As I said, put your Bible in the fireplace, you might as well get the heat from burning it. You bring this teaching in, you bring this teaching in—all right, people say, "Why has the church finally dug its heels in here?" Why? Because those of us who study the Scripture seriously understand. We understand. Come to this point, and the whole lot's gone. Accept this, and we've accepted destruction. Accept this, we've turned our back on Christ. Accept this, and we never were God's people, because there is no such thing as God's people, because there's no such thing as Scripture to put your trust in, there's no such thing as an immutable God to trust in, there's no such thing as sin and the conviction of sin, and there's no such thing as being born again!

Accept this? What is there? There's nothing. You're finished. We're all finished, and we're wasting our time. Let's go and party. We're just useless conglomerations of chance matter. We might as well enjoy what little bit of existence we've got, and tomorrow, we die. That's what this teaching does. It destroys Christianity, full stop.

In Mark 9:42, Jesus said, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea." And the little ones in context, as we looked at a few weeks back, are the believers. They're His children. Whoever causes one of His children to sin.

I can't claim any prophetic word here. I can't claim to know that this is the sin that leads to death. And I'll put a clarification here because I don't want anyone to walk out and misunderstand. The practice of homosexuality itself is a sin, but I'm not saying that that's a sin that leads to death. All sin leads to death, but in context, John is talking about the sin of someone who claims to be a believer and who is not; someone who claims to be a believer and who is actually slated down for destruction.

We're all sinners. I've committed sins. I've said to you before, if you knew some of the things I've done, you wouldn't let me speak. And maybe if I knew some of things you've done, I wouldn't speak to you. We're all sinful, we're all sinners. It's a fact. That's the way it is.

But to say that you are a teacher, to be a person of influence, a person preaching, sermons going around the world on the Internet, books turning up in the Christian bookstores, teaching one of these little ones to sin—if there's a sin that leads to death, I don't know what else comes closer. I don't know what else comes closer.

If your teaching destroys the doctrine of Scripture, destroys the very doctrine of God Himself; if your teaching destroys the doctrine of sin, the bad news that someone must get before they will receive the good news; if your teaching destroys the good news and says that there's no such thing as regeneration, there's no such thing as repentance and turning away from sin; if your teaching destroys the very idea that there is such a thing as holiness and reduces sin to being failing to be all that you can be, failing to live your best life now—you've destroyed the gospel. You've destroyed the very thing that Christianity is based upon. You've thumbed your nose at God. You've turned your back on the divine word of God. You've turned your back on the conviction of the Holy Spirit. You've turned your back on it all.

I struggle to think of what other sin it would be that I'm certain is a sin that leads to death, and those who do so, we should not pray for them. They claim that they are God's people, but they're wolves in sheep's clothing. As I said, I'm not a prophet. I can't say that I've received a word from God telling me that this teaching is the sin that leads to death, or tells me that this teaching is *a* sin that leads to death. But Scripture and reason and God's revelation lead me to this conclusion. I say that it is a sin that leads to death. I say that it is something that divides.

Every generation, it would seem, come to their testing time. In the West and in the Western church, this apparently is going to be our test and this is going to be our testing time. This is going to be the point of division. This is going to be the point of departure. Under the sovereign providence of God, this is an evil that's been given to us to fight. We're going to be called all the things under the sun. I'm a purveyor of hate-speech and a bigot, apparently. We can live with it. Why? Because we have to live according to God's word. We have to give glory to God. We have to give glory to Jesus Christ. We have to proclaim that the word is the word. This is the way. Walk you in it.

This is a cross that has to be borne by Christians. This is cross that's going to separate us from people. It will happen. It's happening now. It's happening much faster in the U.S. than here and Australia, but we all know what certain politicians want and what they're trying to do. We all know the way they're trying to take it, the direction they're trying to give to this society. Herd the people over the edge of the cliff to destruction.

We must pray. We must pray for ourselves, we must pray for our nation, for the people around us. We must be committing ourselves to prayer and to clinging closely to the word of God. We've got to cling to it. If everything else gets stripped away and we get left with this, we've got treasure. We've got treasure, we've got eternal life, we've got life in God, we've got life in Christ Jesus. If everything else falls by the wayside, this is what we've been given. This is what we must hold onto. We'll close there.

Father in heaven, O Lord our God, forgive us, for we are sinful people of a sinful nation. Lord, I do pray and continue to pray that you would lay once again your restraining hand of grace upon

our people. I pray, Lord, that you would pour out your Spirit upon your churches. I pray, Lord, that you would call sinners to repentance. I pray, Lord, that you would use us to proclaim the truth. I pray, Lord, that you would make us faithful. Help us to be true in all circumstances. Let us never be those who back down or turn away from the word of God, or turn away from the revelation that we've been given. Lord our God, help us in this. We are but creatures of dust. Bless us with the power of your Holy Spirit. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.