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What You Absolutely Need To Know Before You Get Married (Part 3)



What You Absolutely Need To Know Before You Get Married - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg examines the topic of divorce from a biblical perspective. Drawing from Ecclesiastes and Malachi, he emphasizes the importance of making and keeping vows to God and one's spouse. Ultimately, Gregg argues that divorce compromises the purity, testimony, and unity of the Church, with an especially negative impact on the children of divorced parents. While he acknowledges exceptions and nuances to the teaching against divorce, he cautions listeners to consider the costs of divorce and remain committed to their marital promises.

Transcript

We're going to talk about the subject of divorce for a little while here. And I want to begin by looking at a scripture in Ecclesiastes, chapter 5, and verses 4 through 7. Solomon said, When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed.

Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there also is vanity, but fear God.

Now, some of his phraseology is a little strange, and I don't want to go into everything he said. But one thing Solomon is saying very clearly is that if you've made a vow, you better keep the vow, because God has no pleasure in fools, and that's apparently what he says you are, if you don't keep the vows you've made to God. And so, you don't have to make vows.

Better not to make a vow at all. In Israel, no one was required to make vows to God. People would make vows to God many times just because of a moment of religious fervor they felt and they wanted to say, Oh God, I'll give you the first thing that comes out of my house when I come back victorious from battle.

Sometimes that was something that didn't work out so well. But that was a vow that

Jephthah took and did not change, though he swore to his own hurt. Sometimes it's better not to vow at all.

And to tell you the truth, Paul even said that about marriage. He said, Some people, it's nice not to marry. He said, You can marry, but I would spare you the complications.

He says, If you get married, you'll have some trouble in the flesh that you won't have otherwise. Although, Paul didn't say as many modern single people would, If you don't get married, you can play the field and have a great time pursuing your own selfish life. No, he said, If you don't get married, you can serve Jesus with every moment of your day.

Whereas, if you get married, you've got to please your wife or your husband, too. So, I mean, there is more liberty in being single. But as far as Paul's concerned, even a free man is Christ's slave.

And so, if you're not bound in a marriage, you're much more free to give all of your time to serving the Lord. And if you are married, you still have to give all your time to serving the Lord. And so, serving the Lord is largely described as serving your family, your spouse, much of the time, because they are the stewardship He's given.

Now, I'm not concerned in this lecture to talk about those who never make a vow, but those who make a vow and don't keep it. This is something that Solomon says you would be very well advised not to ever do. You make a vow, God expects you to keep the vow.

Like we were saying in our last talk, a person that God will welcome into His presence is the kind of person who makes an oath, swears to his own hurt, and doesn't change. He keeps the oath, like Jephthah did, or like Joshua did, when the Gibeonites even deceived him and pretended to be people from a far country that were not wrong for him to make a covenant with. And yet, they were people who he was not supposed to make covenant with.

He didn't know that he made a covenant. When he found out, he kept it, even though he kicked himself for having made such a rash vow. But having made a rash vow, he didn't feel like he had the liberty to say, well, that was a rash vow.

I made a mistake. I guess I just won't keep my word. That's how many people are, once they get married, they think, I made a mistake.

Therefore, certainly God wouldn't expect me to perpetuate this mistake. You know, there's no sense repeating one mistake with a second mistake. Getting married is, in fact, for some people, a mistake.

They choose very poorly. They choose someone who's not going to serve the Lord with them, someone who'd be a very poor parent to their children, somebody who's got life-

dominated problems that are going to be just labor-intensive just to keep that person out of trouble. There's a lot of mistakes that people have made in getting married.

But getting divorced is also a mistake. Why add another mistake? Once you have been married, you have an obligation. Now, remember, this life is a test.

This life is not all there is. I've often heard people in unhappy marriages say, I just can't imagine spending the rest of my life in this kind of a marriage. Well, you won't if you're a Christian.

The rest of your life is an eternity. It kind of starts after you die. So you will not spend the rest of your life in this marriage.

You might spend the rest of your earthly life in this marriage, but that's a vapor. Paul said, our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory while we don't look at the things that are seen, but we look at the things that are not seen. For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal.

We are supposed to be looking at eternity, not at what is seen. When we look at what is seen, we need to see it for what it is. It is, in one sense, an opportunity to promote the kingdom of God and to glorify God.

In a more personal sense, it is a test of whether we will reign with Him. Paul said in 2 Timothy 2, if we endure, we will reign with Him. That's what God has in mind for us.

Now, you might not be the kind of person who cares about reigning. I'm not. I never have wanted to lead an organization.

I've never wanted to be in charge of anything. It's hard for me to take responsibility even when I'm required to. I will when I have to, but I kind of am sheepish about taking charge of any organization.

I certainly don't want to rule the world. Well, I do if God wants me to, but I don't want to if He doesn't. I have no particular ambition to rule, but if Christ made us to reign with Him, then that must be what He wants, and if He wants it, I say, OK, I'll try.

I'll do what you want me to do here. And He doesn't want to put people in charge of His world, the world to come, as the writer of Hebrews refers to it. He does not put angels in charge of the world to come, but men.

But when He puts people in charge of the world to come, He's going to put people who have been tested to see if they're loyal, see if they're faithful. You know, people have sometimes asked me on the air often, you know, why did God set Adam and Eve up for failure like that? Why did He even put that tree in the garden where they'd be tempted?

Why did He even let the devil get at them? I mean, it just seems like God was setting them up to fail. No, He was setting them up to be tested.

When you're tested, you can pass or you can fail. Well, why did He want them to be tested? Well, why did He make them? In Genesis 1, 26 and 27, God said, Let us make man our image and let us give them dominion over the birds of the air and the fish of the sea and the birds and the beasts of the field. Notice, He wanted to share dominion.

He wanted them to reign with Him. He couldn't give that kind of dominion to the dolphins, as smart as they may be, or to dogs or horses or even apes. He had to make something more like Himself, something that could go good or ill, choose right or wrong, and had to be tested.

Because if you put a really nasty person in charge of the world, I mean, think of North Korea, the kind of person they got running that place. Untested, unreliable, insane even. And, you know, God doesn't just want to say, Let's make some people and just put them on the throne.

No, let's have children here who will be tested. They'll go through school. They'll go through tests.

We'll see, will they be loyal? Will they trust Me? Will they throw in the towel and join the enemy? Good to find that out before you give them authority. And this whole life for Adam and Eve was a test. Now, God didn't set them up to fail.

He set them up to succeed because their test had only one question on it. And He told them the answer before the test came. It's like a professor saying to his whole class, Your whole grade is going to depend on answering this one question on your test, and I'll tell you right now what the answer is.

That's what God did with Adam and Eve. Is that setting people up to fail? I think not. They failed in spite of God doing everything He could to prevent that.

And so do we. See, temptation, the word temptation means a test. And when there's a temp, the reason there's a tempter is because there's a test to take.

And this whole life is that test. It's a series of tests, obviously. Every time we're tempted, we're being tested.

Are you going to be loyal to God or disloyal to God? Let's see how you do this time. Didn't do so good on the last one, but there's always a make-up test at least until the final. The sad thing is you never know which one's going to be the final.

You never know, you know, if you fail a lot of tests now, but in the end you're faithful unto death to Christ, you pass the final, you get to go to the throne, you get to reign with

Christ. That's what He wants, whether you want it or not. And frankly, I got a feeling if He made us for that, it's probably very fulfilling to reign.

I don't know who we're going to reign over. Don't ask me, I don't know. But if that's the destiny God has, then I want it.

I want what He wants. There can't be anything more fulfilling than doing whatever God made you to do. And so qualifying for that means being faithful to death, and that means passing the test, the temptations.

The devil is there for a reason. If he wasn't, he wouldn't be there. God would not let him be there.

You know God is someday going to take the devil and pick him up by the nap of the neck and toss him in the lake of fire, and that'd be the end of the devil. Why hasn't He done that yet? Why didn't He do it before Adam and Eve met Him? What's holding that up? The devil exists because God at this moment wants him to exist. Why? He's the tester.

This is the school. This is the class. This is where God gives the instructions and says, Will you keep the instructions? I'll bring in Mr. Examiner, who's going to give you the tests and see how you do.

That's why there was a tree in the garden. It wasn't an accident. It wasn't an act of poor judgment on God's part.

God didn't put Adam and Eve in that world just to live in paradise. They were there to be tested for something greater, as we are. When we are in marriages that are difficult and tempted to find an easy way out, by the way, there isn't one.

There's a way out in divorce, but it's not an easy way out. Anyone who thinks there's an easy way out of divorce I don't think has been through one yet. Divorce is a meat grinder to go through, and once you've gone through the meat grinder and you just feel like hamburger, it's still there.

It's still there 10 years later, 20 years later. It's there for the rest of your life, and it doesn't go away, I suppose, unless everybody who was ever involved in that rage dies, and you're the last survivor. I guess maybe it went away then, but not even then, because you've been shaped by that.

You're not innocent anymore. Even if you were innocent, you're not naive. You're jaded by that.

I mean, divorce, it never leaves anyone unscathed, honestly. It's not an easy way out, but the devil, the tester, he says, has God said you will be faithful unto death? Ah, but I've got this other option for you. You can be happier, more fulfilled.

There's another person out there better than the one you have, or even just being out of the marriage is better than being in it, and there's the test, and I would just urge any married person at all costs to not fail that test. Divorce is failing the test. If you have taken the initiative to get married, and no one made you do that, if you got married at gunpoint, it's because of an earlier choice you made that you didn't have to make.

No one made you be married except you. That's a voluntary choice. You might say, I made a mistake.

Well, mistakes are often made. Let's try to limit the number of those rather than multiply them, and divorce is another mistake. Do not make that one.

What is at stake in divorce? Especially, I mean, this is whether Christians or non-Christians divorce. Frankly, if it's Christians, when a couple divorces, it compromises the purity and the testimony and the unity of the church, all of which are very sacred things to God, high priorities to God, and a person is caring nothing about those when they frivolously, and I would mean frivolously being without grounds, get a divorce. The purity of the church is compromised because where one member suffers, all suffer.

Where one person sins, you know, God caused the whole nation of Israel to be defeated in battle against Ai because one guy in his family had hidden some stuff from Jericho in his tent, and he wasn't supposed to. There was sin in the camp, and 30-something people lost their lives over it, and the whole nation was humiliated. You're part of a body here.

In the body of Christ, every sin in the body compromises every other member of the body. When Jimmy Swaggart, if some of you are old enough to remember, when Jimmy Swaggart was caught in scandals, everyone in the evangelical world was scandalized by it. It made everyone have egg on their face who is a Christian.

And even if you're not that famous and your sins aren't going to be broadcast internationally, there's people who know you. There's people in the church. There's people looking at the church.

They say, see, following Jesus isn't any different than anything else. These people don't keep their promises any more than anyone else. The purity, the testimony of the church, and the unity of the church, because what so often happens is someone leaves their spouse and wants to stay in the same church where their spouse is.

You ever seen this? It's amazing. A man will leave his wife, and he and his mistress will sit on that side of the church, and the wife and the children that he's left are on that side of the church. And everyone's just sitting there pretending not to notice.

Worst of all, the pastor and the elders pretend not to notice. That's not acceptable. It scandalizes the church.

It makes the church disunified because usually in a divorce, friends and family have to take sides because people who get divorced usually do so with great hostility. If it's a very friendly thing, then they shouldn't get divorced at all. I mean, why would anyone get divorced if they can survive living with each other? In extreme cases, people sometimes divorce because they can't stand each other.

But if they can't stand each other in the same church, that's disunity in the church, not only for the two of them, but for the two who think the wife is the one who is in the right, the two that think the husband is the one on the right, and then the church divides over it. And frankly, all your friends and family have to make that kind of decision when you make a divorce. It ruins everybody's life who cares about you.

It also, of course, sullies the sanctity of the divine institution of marriage. It treats it as if it isn't a divine institution or as if divine institutions don't matter, and you don't have to take them seriously. You see, every divorce in the church is another vote against the sanctity of marriage.

Every divorce. I don't know how many it takes to reach the tipping point where no one takes marriage seriously anymore. I think we might have reached that point in our culture.

No divorce stands alone. It simply becomes another statistic, and the statistics, as they increase, are communicating something. It means that those people who have not yet married or who are married and unhappy say, you know, divorce isn't that bad.

After all, half the people are doing it. You see, it no longer allows most people to think of marriage as what it is, a divine thing, especially if Christians are ignoring it. Well, you know, who's to say that anyone should pay attention to it then? And therefore, the sanctity of marriage is definitely compromised, and the security of children and their right to be raised by their original parents is destroyed.

Now, I'm not saying children never come out okay in divorce. They just never come out the same. They usually feel like they're the ones responsible when they usually have nothing to do with it.

Someone was telling me during the break here that his parents divorced when he was young, and he and his brother felt that it was their fault. That's very common. Children often think it's their fault.

They love both of their parents. They can't figure why their parents wouldn't love each other. It must be them that's the problem.

And more than that, children from fatherless homes are in great peril socially. It's statistically known that children from divorce homes, first of all, about 93% of them live with their mother in a fatherless home. About 93% of marriages, the custody of the kids

goes to the mother automatically.

And this I have to just say, I just thank God for His intervention in my life because, as you know, I've suffered terribly two very, very painful divorces. In both cases, I got the custody of the children without a fight. I didn't have to go to court about it.

I refused to fight my wife over this, and my first wife surrendered custody after the divorce, and the second one actually just gave me the kids, custody of the kids in the divorce papers. Her lawyer wrote up. So, I mean, I was torn up by the divorce, but I didn't realize how fortunate I was.

If this marriage was going to end, God just graciously, just without me doing anything to make it happen, I got the custody of my own kids. How terrible it would have been for me more if my kids had gone with their mothers and lived the way that their mothers had subsequently lived. It just would have been very, very hard to live with.

So I feel like God's been very merciful to me in that because He beat the odds in my case because it is 93% of kids are given to their mothers no matter who is living responsibly, no matter who's the drunk, whoever's the adulterer or adulteress. The court's just automatically given to the mother. But that means that in 93% of divorces, kids are being raised in a fatherless home.

God gave children fathers for their protection, and sometimes the ones they have to be protected from are the men who replace their fathers. Children are often abused by stepfathers, probably more than by any other person in their immediate circle. Children of divorce are in a much higher risk group for criminal behavior.

I mean, just look at the population of the prisons. Probably 80%—I've heard this statistic, I don't remember it, but a huge—an unthinkably huge statistic of men in prisons, their parents divorced when they were kids, and they are raised in a fatherless home. And, of course, gang membership.

Most of these kids don't have fathers in their home. Suicide, drug abuse, alcoholism with women, especially girls, prostitution or simply promiscuity, teen pregnancy and abortion. These things happen among the children of divorced parents at an incredibly higher percentage.

Anyone who has children and ever contemplates divorce at all should think, I'm putting my children at incredible risk. How much does my self-love matter to me that I would do this damage to my children? And even the children that manage to keep out of that, out of those antisocial behaviors and destructive behaviors, they're not the same. They don't have the same innocence as children who never saw their parents hate each other and divide and see their parents fight over, you know, visitation.

I mean, this is just not what children are made for. And divorce just takes that away from

children. Remember Jesus said, whoever causes one of these little ones who believes me to stumble, better for him to have a millstone put around his neck and be cast in the depths of the sea.

That sounds like a pretty severe and nasty way to go. And Jesus said, well, that's actually better. You'd be better off if that's what they did to you than what's really going to happen to you or what you really deserve.

Better for them to have a millstone put around their neck and be cast in the sea than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. Certainly, every parent who seeks a divorce and has children is strongly tempting their children to stumble. And in most cases, children are not very good at resisting that temptation and they do stumble.

A very, very large number of millennials come from that generation whose parents did not value their marriages and most of them are not believers, as you have probably heard the statistics. A very, very small percentage of believers, even from Christian families, even church-raised kids, not very many of them are believers when they reach adulthood and they're from that culture of divorce. It's not a coincidence.

The reason divorce is wrong, first of all, is because you're breaking a vow that you made before God and man. It also steals from your partner things that you promised not to steal from them. In many cases, not all, you may be taking their virginity.

In my first marriage, I was a virgin when I got married. My wife at the time was 18 and she couldn't remember ever having been a virgin. But she was one of those people who was a hippie and got saved in the Jesus movement out of a very drug and alcohol and promiscuous background and she told me she couldn't remember how many men she'd been with.

That was sort of intriguing to me as a kid who'd been totally a virgin until that point, raised in the church, having opposites, I guess, attracted. She was converted. I thought, well, all things become new, right? Old things are passed away.

Well, I didn't understand that verse very accurately. An awful lot of things had not become new and they don't automatically become new with conversion. But the truth is, I felt one thing when she left that I got ripped off of was my virginity.

I was saving that for one person that I was going to give that up for for a lifetime. And I held it. I held on to it until I married.

And then she took it and she couldn't value it. She didn't value her own. And I'm not trying to put her down.

I'm just saying when you divorce your spouse, in many cases, you've taken their purity, and especially if they saved it for you. That is one of the greatest rip-offs that you can

do. It's probably more often the case with men when they divorce their wives that their wives may have been virgins, although there's fewer and fewer cases of that these days since so many people live together before marriage or sleep together.

But the truth is, there are still some virgins who hold it till marriage, and then their spouses dash it to pieces and care nothing for it. That's an incredible injustice. It takes away innocence.

It takes away your spouse's privacy. Think of all those secrets they've told you that they haven't told other people. Think of how many things you've observed in their life that others don't know, and they depend on you and your secrecy and your loyalty not to broadcast those things.

Their secrecy, their privacy is suddenly damaged. Also, however many years they've been married, they have forfeited other options by being married to you. If they stayed married to you, it's because they were investing in a lifelong relationship.

This was not a loan. This was a buy-in. You invest in things together.

Having children is the biggest investment you make together. But you also invest years. Those are years of youth, which after 20 years, a man who leaves his wife or a wife who leaves her husband has taken away 20 years of options where that person might have found a more faithful mate if they weren't already occupied being faithful to an unfaithful one.

I mean, this is just—if this doesn't bother anyone's conscience to do this, I'm not sure if they have any conscience left. These things are huge injustices. And the truth is, the person you commit these injustices toward is usually the person that you truly are most indebted to, especially if you've been married for very many years.

When you first get married, your parents still might have some claim to being the people you're most indebted to. They've done more for you, more years of your life. But after you've left home and you've got friends and such and you get married, before very long, your spouse is the one you're most indebted to because they, in some measure, serve you.

They might financially support you somewhat. They give up their freedom to be with you. And these are big investments they make.

And if someone invests heavily in you and you just say, sorry, I'm done, why? I'm just done, sorry. You've basically really done an injustice against someone that you actually have some debt to, someone that you owe a great deal to, most of all God, but secondly your spouse. It's just a horrendous sin, and that's why God hates it.

In Malachi 2, it says God hates divorce. That doesn't mean he never sees any of it as

justified on one party's part. But as I said earlier, a divorce never happens without heinous sin.

It is either a heinous sin to divorce where there's not been a heinous sin by the other party or the other party has committed the heinous sin that causes the divorce. In any case, there's never a divorce that takes place where everything's cool, everything's pure, nothing ever went wrong. Something has gone terribly wrong whenever there's a divorce, and divorce is one of the wrongs, and it may be the greatest of the wrongs.

You really have in the Christian life a mandate that is not negotiable, and that is forgiveness. Jesus said if you don't forgive others their trespasses, your father will not forgive you yours. Now, just as every spouse is greatly indebted to their spouse for years of service and loyalty or whatever support, so also everyone who's been married for very long has had a number of things to forgive, to forgive their spouse, and they've given their spouse something to forgive in them because feelings get hurt, anniversaries are forgotten, you know, the toilet seat is left up, things like that.

You know, that you really have annoyances, inconsiderateness that every party has, and in a marriage of Christians, of course, the Christian forgives routinely. That's what Christians do. Jesus said in Mark chapter 11, verse 25, when you stand praying, forgive, if you have ought against anyone, so that your heavenly Father may forgive you your trespasses.

You're just praying, and you remember there's something someone did that bugs you, well, just forgive them, just unilaterally. Now, there's another teaching on forgiveness that Jesus gave that some people think contradicts that, it doesn't, it supplements it. In Luke chapter 17, Jesus said, if your brother sins against you, rebuke him.

If he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in one day, and seven times says, I repent, you shall forgive him. Now, over in Mark 11, Jesus said, if you remember you have something against someone, forgive them.

Now, he's saying, if someone sins against you, you got to confront them about that. You got to tell them they did it. You got to rebuke them.

And if they repent, you forgive them. What's up with that? Do you have to forgive people if they don't repent? Yes and no. And that's not just double talk, because there's two aspects of forgiveness.

Forgiveness happens in the heart, first, and in the relationship, second. The first part of forgiveness is internal. The second part is external, restoration of a relationship that's been damaged.

The part that's in your heart is called unconditional love. A person does not have to repent or be good or be friendly to you to be loved by you. Jesus said, love your enemies.

Do good to those who persecute you. Bless those who curse you. Even if that happens to be your spouse, and some people are married to people who do that.

Well, your assignment is clear. Love them. Love them unconditionally.

You can't love them conditionally, because they're not meeting any conditions. When Jesus said, love your enemy, you're loving someone who gives you no reason to. You just do it because God said to, and that's what God does.

He causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. He's kind to all. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

Not counting their transgressions against them. Not counting the offenses against them. So, here God, before anyone even repented, He just says, I'm going to just kind of forgive you from my heart.

Well, then is everyone saved? Well, no, because there's more to forgiveness than just the way someone feels towards someone. There's also the trust factor. I said earlier, relationships are not built on love, they're built on trust.

Although love is a very important and desirable factor in a relationship, a relationship can continue if there's trust, even where love is deficient. But you shouldn't have deficiency of either. You should be loving and trusting.

But the point is, if someone betrays you, you can't trust them. You can love somebody unconditionally, but you can't trust anyone unconditionally. If they've shown that they're not faithful, if they've shown that they're not trustworthy, you can't just trust them unless they earn it back.

And there's nothing wrong with requiring trust to be earned. It's the only way it can be acquired, unless you're gullible. And the Bible does not advocate gullibility.

I know some non-Christians think we're just a bunch of gullible people. That's what faith is, being gullible. No, the Bible says don't.

No, you don't believe every spirit. You test the spirits to see whether they're of God. You're not supposed to be gullible.

You're supposed to prove all things and hold fast what is good. But trust is earnable. Somebody who has a history of being faithful long enough will tend to be trusted.

But if someone—you can break trust instantly. Regaining it is a process that takes time, sadly. But you can lose trust simply by sinning against someone.

But that relationship is worth recovering. And therefore, Jesus said, if your brother sins against you, rebuke him. And if he repents, forgive him.

This is the other side of forgiveness. You already forgave him in your heart. That's why you're approaching him in the first place.

You value the relationship. You value that person. You want things to get better again.

If you didn't love him, you'd say, well, good riddance. Who needs him? There's too much pain in the neck to try to stay in friendship with. You value them because you forgive them in your heart.

You have unconditional love. You can't have unconditional trust. You have to see if they repent.

If they repent, say, oh, man, did I do that to you? I have no idea what I was doing. I don't approve of that kind of behavior. I did the wrong thing.

I'm terribly sorry. I don't want to do that anymore. Well, then they've at least taken steps toward being trustworthy.

I mean, if you confront them and they don't do that, then how can you trust them? If they stuck you in the back with a knife and you say, hey, I think this is your knife back there. And they say, well, give me another one. I'll stick it in there again.

Well, then you're not going to turn your back to them. You're not going to trust them. But if they really do care and they really say, oh, I admit that was a wrong thing for me to do.

I don't generally do that. I don't know why I did that. I was just being evil.

I did the wrong thing. Will you forgive me? Jesus says, yeah, you do. You forgive me.

Even if that happens multiple times in a day. Now, what that does is allow the relationship to kind of get back on the track. Until you've done that, if someone's wronged you and you've never confronted them and never told them, and you've never seen them repent, you might act like there's a relationship, but you're always going to be having reserve.

You know they did that that time. You're never sure if they'll do it again. You're just going to keep them a little at arm's length.

You might not appear to because you live in the same house it may be, but you're not going to trust them completely, and that relationship is going to erode. Communication over offenses is a necessary thing. Now, Jesus, of course, gave that example in Luke 17.

If your brother, you know, offends you or sins you, rebuke him and he repents, forgive him. What if he doesn't? Certainly that happens often enough. You confront someone saying, you know, what you did was wrong.

He said, no, I didn't. That wasn't wrong. That was justified.

Or, I didn't do that. They just don't let it, they don't acknowledge it. What do you do then? Well, Jesus answered that in Matthew 18.

He said, if your brother sins against you, verse 15, go and speak to him about it between yourself and him alone. If he hears you, you've won your brother, and it's all good. The process is over.

He's now done what Luke 17 says. You rebuke him, he repented. But Jesus said, if he doesn't repent, if he doesn't hear you, then take two or more witnesses.

And if he doesn't hear them, then you take it before the church. And if he doesn't hear the church, well, that's the last court of appeal. If the church says, listen, you did wrong, you need to repent.

He says, no, I didn't. Well, then, there's the door. Jesus said, you treat him like a heathen or a tax collector.

In other words, the church gives the person every opportunity to repent and every reason to believe that they need to with these various opportunities, increasingly less private opportunities. It starts out with a private confrontation. Now, Jesus makes it very clear in his teaching that we are responsible for fixing relationships that can be fixed.

If somebody has sinned against me, I have a responsibility, not only to love them unconditionally and forgive them in my heart, I need to do what I can to restore the relationship. And that means usually talking to them. Now, I understand in marriage, sometimes there's a lot of tender wounds and things like that.

And some things you just don't bring up anymore, even if they're continuing problems. It's just out of sensitivity, you know, this will not go well if I bring this up. But on the other hand, you've got to make sure that the person that you're holding a grievance against knows about it and they have a chance to repent of it.

In one of my marriages, I had this experience and I've talked to many men who've had this experience. Perhaps women have it too. I've never been on their side.

I've never been on their side of the aisle there. But men often say, you know, my wife has just given me the silent treatment. It's been three days now.

I don't even know what she's bothered by. I ask her and she says, you know, I've told you a thousand times. Well, maybe a thousand and one is necessary because I don't know what it is, you know.

And there's just some people, they get offended by their spouse and they just hold it in and they hold it against and they don't communicate it. See, I always thought, you know,

if I've got a problem with somebody, I want them to know or I want to know what the reason is. There's a few people who've turned against me in my life, friends and such.

I never knew why. And I'd approach them and say, you know, did something happen here between us? You know, like that day we were friends and that day you're not talking to me. I don't know what's going on here.

And many times, they just don't want to, they won't answer. They won't, they don't really have a reason that they can articulate or that they're not ashamed of, I suppose. But the truth is, you can't maintain the same kind of relationship that you need to have, an intimate relationship with anyone, especially not in the same home, unless there's at least openness to communication.

When somebody stops communicating and won't tell what the grievance is, it's time for something to intervene, probably pastoral care, marriage counseling, or something has to come in there so that the wife or husband who's not communicating with the spouse, they find somebody they will communicate to so the spouse can find out, what is it I'm doing wrong? Jesus said, if they sin against you, confront them about it. If they repent, forgive them. If all Christians would do that, then bitterness would never develop in a Christian relationship, in a Christian marriage.

Every time someone offended someone else, and that happens frequently, I suppose, it'd be confronted and there'd be repentance and there'd be forgiveness. And it'd be water under the bridge and we'd now know, okay, I can trust you again, or at least I can work at it, because I see that you have a commitment to do otherwise. That's what repentance suggests, that you have a commitment to do otherwise than keep sinning.

So, that's an important mandate, to forgive. And, of course, divorces never happen if both people are forgiving, completely. But let's face it, I mean, some men and some women in their marriages just don't give the opportunity for someone to really trust because they don't remain faithful.

They don't show the commitment to the marriage that needs to be done. And this is a sin. It's a sin not to be committed to your marriage because your marriage is there to glorify God, and if you sin in your marriage, you're not glorifying God.

And that is what sin is. All have sinned and fallen short of what? Going to heaven? No. Sin is falling short of glorifying God.

That's what Paul said. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Our goal in life is to glorify God.

The failure to do so is what sin actually is. If I have a marriage or a relationship, a friendship, a business partnership, any kind of anything in my life, and it's not my determination to glorify God with that, and I don't do everything I can to make sure that

it glorifies God, that's sin. And for a Christian, sin is not okay.

Sometimes we think, well, I'm forgiven, so it really doesn't matter that much if I sin, right? Well, there is such a thing as forgiveness, to be sure. But forgiveness follows repentance. And repentance, by definition, means you don't want to sin.

Repentance means I'm sorry that I sinned. I don't want to do that anymore. I've changed my mind.

The word repent means change your mind. Metanoia in the Greek means change the mind. So, I've changed my mind.

I don't want to do that anymore. And sure, anytime you're truly repentant, forgiveness is instantaneous. But you can't premeditate sin and repentance.

You can say, I'm going to do this thing, then I'm going to repent of it. How do you know you're going to repent of it? It sounds like if you're calculating to do it, you may not have what it takes to repent. You might not regret it.

You may just regret what you fear the consequences will be. That's not repentance. If a person is determined to please God in all things, including their marriage, they will absolutely avoid divorce at all costs.

Now, it should be made very clear that despite what our society generally says, remarriage is not always an option for people who get a divorce. In fact, some people think it never is because Jesus said some rather absolute sounding things in passages that people sometimes have a hard time, in my opinion, understanding properly. Jesus, for example, in Mark chapter 10, by the way, some people who get divorced aren't interested in remarriage.

They just want out of a bad situation. They might think remarriage is the last thing I want. I'll get into that situation again.

But still, most people who've ever gotten married get married because they're the marrying kind. They like having somebody. That's why they got married in the first place.

And once they're out of a marriage, they're kind of vulnerable to want to be in that position again. But it's not always okay. In Mark chapter 10, in verse 11, Jesus said, Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her.

And the woman who divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery. Now, that sounds absolute, although it is qualified in another passage. And we have to realize that Jesus sometimes made absolute sounding statements knowing that those who listen to him regularly were aware that there were exceptions to that.

I've been saying don't divorce. But I think you might know that I have been divorced. I

didn't get a divorce.

I got divorced. It was done to me. I didn't do it.

But as a divorced person, I've married again. So, obviously, I must think there's some exceptions. But I'd still advise you don't divorce.

Don't divorce. Don't divorce. If you ask me to put a finer point on it, I'd say, well, there are some situations where divorce can be justified.

But that doesn't mean it's even good in that case. And Jesus did that too. Jesus made a lot of sweeping hyperbole statements as if they were without qualification when they really were with qualification.

The Sermon on the Mount is full of that. And that's where he also said something about divorce, which we'll mention in a moment. But, for example, Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount said, Give to everyone who asks you.

He places no qualification on it. Though Paul says if someone doesn't work, they shouldn't eat. So, apparently, you shouldn't give to people who won't work.

You certainly can't give your kids everything they ask for. That'd be crazy. In other words, there are qualifications not stated.

In one of the Gospels, in Mark, I think it's chapter 8, Jesus said, No sign will be given to this generation. Period. But the same statement is found in Matthew 12, where he says, No sign will be given to this generation except the sign of Jonah.

As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. So, one passage in the parallel says, No sign will be given. No qualifications mentioned.

The same statement in Matthew says, Well, except for this one case. Clearly, Jesus often stated in a sweeping way what is generally true. But that doesn't mean that people paying attention to his entire teaching would not recognize that there are some exceptions.

They are few. And you shouldn't be counting on exceptions. These are generally true.

You should not divorce and remarry because Jesus said, The man who divorces and remarries is committing adultery. The wife who divorces and remarries is committing adultery. It's not okay to commit adultery.

In fact, Paul said, Adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God. So, it's not a small matter committing adultery, you know. And no Christian should ever be open to it.

But there are passages in Matthew that do state a condition. And I'd like to show you these, just so we'll have, I hope, a balanced idea of what Jesus really said and intended. In Matthew chapter 5, which is in the Sermon on the Mount, where there are also a number of other rather hyperbole-type statements.

I mean, when you think about it, when he said, If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn the other cheek. Well, that's not a wrong thing to do. I've only been struck once by a hostile partner.

I did literally turn the other cheek. I didn't know what else to do. Jesus said, Do it.

And it seemed like the right thing to me. But there are times when you might turn the other cheeks and run away, you know. I mean, it's like Jesus did say, When they persecute you in one, they flee to the next.

It's not like you just have to sit, stand there and be pummeled continually, just because I'm supposed to turn the other cheek. Well, turning the other cheek is the right response if the option is to fight back. But there are other responses.

You know, it's not always what you have to do. There are other godly ways to respond. But he's making a point using hyperbole, which means a strong exaggeration.

It doesn't sound like there's exceptions, but there certainly are. He said, If a man makes you go one mile, go two with him. Well, what if the guy only wants to go one? Sorry, I got to go two.

Jesus said so. You can catch up with me a mile down the road, and I'll give you your equipment back, you know. Now, obviously, Jesus is speaking in general terms, and those are in the Sermon on the Mount, too.

And then in that passage, he actually does, in the Sermon on the Mount, state an exception, because he says in Matthew chapter 5 and verse 33, no, I'm sorry, verse 32. He says, I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. Now, that last sign, anyone who marries a woman who's divorced, sounds absolute, but he's already qualified the teaching by except for this case of fornication.

Divorce is not okay, except in the case of fornication. Anyone who marries a woman divorced in that way, that is, without the exception, is committing adultery. The marriage, the first marriage covenant is not completely broken, where there's been no adultery.

And therefore, if you're in a marriage relationship with one person, you can't at the same time enter a marriage relationship with a second person. And although the courts of our

land don't care at all about the morality of marriage, God does. Jesus describes a person who actually has gotten a legal divorce and no doubt gotten another legal marriage.

The society says they're divorced in marriage. Jesus says, no, that's adultery, that's not marriage. There are a lot of people who are in second or third or fourth or fifth marriages now who are really in what Jesus called adultery, not marriage.

Remember the woman at the well, she'd had five husbands and she was living with a man that wasn't her husband. It's interesting that Jesus allowed that five of those husbands were legitimate. There must have been grounds for divorce in those cases.

And he recognized five legitimate marriages. Certainly Jesus didn't say that there could never be a second marriage, but there can't be if you still have an obligation to the first one. When you made promises you're supposed to be keeping, you're supposed to keep them.

If you join up with somebody else while you're supposed to be keeping your original promises, you're in adultery. Even if the court gives you something called a marriage license, what do those matter in courts? They'll take it away as quick as they'll give it and for no reason either. They'll marry people who aren't supposed to be married.

They'll marry same-sex couples. What does the court know about marriage? How would the church ever fare if we decide to let the courts decide who's married and who's not married? Now the church has a king who has already declared who's married and who's not and what kind of relationships are marriage and what kind are adultery. A second marriage is adultery if the first marriage has never been really, if you're not freed.

And he says, unless there's been fornication. Now fornication is a term that the Bible uses for all forms of sexual immorality. In Jude, homosexuality in Sodom is referred to as fornication.

In 1 Corinthians 5, a man living with his father's wife in incest, that's called fornication there. Pornea is the Greek word. In the Old Testament, in the Greek Septuagint, when people committed adultery, that's called fornication.

We might think of the English word fornication which means premarital sex and that's different than adultery, homosexuality, incest, pedophilia, whatever. All those unlawful forms of sex are pornea. Fornication is the generic term in the Greek for all forms of sexual misbehavior.

And that would mean that a man or a woman whose spouse is involved in, you know, child molesting or homosexual acts or with another woman or man in an adulterous relationship, that's fornication. Those would be the things that Jesus is allowing as the exception to the general rule. The general rule is if you divorce or remarry, that's adultery, period.

But except, of course, in the case of fornication, that does add another wrinkle, a different moral aspect. Because the person who's committing adultery is essentially saying, I'm out of here. I'm out of this marriage.

I'm with this person now. Now, I want to make something very clear, too. A lot of people who have unhappy marriages almost hope for their spouse to commit adultery because they belong to a church that believes, as I do, that you shouldn't divorce if there's no adultery.

But a person should never want their marriage to end. And a friend of mine told me that my ex-wife told them before when she left that she was announcing that she's just going to be separated for the purpose of reconciliation. But she said, I'm just going to wait until he can't take it anymore.

And when he commits adultery, I'll divorce him. Well, she had to wait a long time because I don't commit adultery. But the fact is she decided not to wait and divorced me anyway.

It would have been a very long wait, probably until death. But the point here is that you can't force your partner into adultery without yourself being culpable. You know, this happens a lot.

Women do this to men a lot, and men do it to women a little bit. And that is to deprive each other of ordinary physical relations. I think the reason women do it to men more than men to women, though I know both kinds of cases, is that men are much more enslaved to their drives.

And it's one of the ways that a woman really does have power over a man. A woman's usually the weaker vessel, usually the smaller, sometimes not as aggressive, maybe passively, but not so outwardly aggressive. And the one area where a wife really has control is in bed.

And I think, of course, there's another thing, and that is that wives don't, they're not in the mood for sex if everything isn't right in the relationship. That's unlike men, too. And so, men are much more easily taken advantage of.

But we don't know of a case, even a pastor who has not had sex with his wife for years, and she would be open to it. But this cuts both ways. But I hear much more often of it being, you know, the woman depriving the man.

But Paul talked about that. In 1 Corinthians 7, he said, Don't deprive each other, lest Satan tempt you for your incontinence. In other words, if you are married, that's supposed to be a place where sexual intimacy is offered to each other, not for self-satisfaction, but for mutual satisfaction, or preferably for you just be concerned to satisfy the other person.

You know, no one would get divorced over sexual frustration if their whole goal was to satisfy their partner, and their partner's whole goal is to satisfy them, because they wouldn't be thinking about whether they themselves are satisfied or not. That's not what they're there for. But the truth is that people do deprive each other, and they do think about themselves more than their partner.

And Paul says, You know what you're doing? You're setting up your spouse for temptation. You deprive them, the devil will tempt you more for that. Now, if you happen to be a spouse who's being deprived in that way, that's not an excuse to fall to temptation.

But if you're the spouse doing the depriving, you're creating the temptation. Jesus said it's inevitable that stumbling blocks will come, but woe to him by whom they come. And we all have to face temptation and defeat it.

And if our spouse is creating more temptation, well, the worst for us, it's going to be a lot harder, but we still have to defeat it. We still have to be pure. But woe unto the one who's causing that.

Woe to the one who's undermining the strength and foundation of the marriage by trying to control in that way. Or simply just not being sensitive to the fact that the other person has needs. This is a very important thing in marriage.

And a lot of people divorce because they think they'll find more sexual satisfaction outside the marriage. And sometimes they appear to. It's a shame that it's only sexual satisfaction they find as well as condemnation.

Because sexual satisfaction is a very poor substitute for a clear conscience and an unbroken relationship with God. But some people choose it. After all, we live in a society that worships sex more than God in many cases.

You can tell. I mean, everyone knows that we do. That's why people say, you can't tell me who I can love when they're talking about being homosexuals.

Of course you can't tell me who they can love. What's that got to do with it? We're saying you can't have sex. We're not even saying that.

We're saying you can have sex if you want, but you can't call that marriage and you can't tell us that we can't call it a sin. You can do what you want. We're not telling you who you can love and who you can't love.

We're not even telling you who you can't have sex with. We believe that God will disapprove and we can't approve if you have sex with the wrong person. But at the same time, we're not here to interfere with you doing what you want.

But calling it marriage is something that we cannot be made to do. But you see, people think that love and sex are the same thing. I love this person.

Well, wonderful. Love them. I love them, too.

I hope. I'm supposed to love everybody. I love you, too.

But what's that got to do with it? Unless you worship sex and sex is the same thing as love, I mean, this is what our society has lost touch with. And many marriages break up because people are tempted to infidelity, to unfaithfulness by giving far too much value to imagined sexual excitement that they think they'll find outside the marriage. Sometimes it's not merely imagined, I suppose.

I'm not saying they never find it, but like I said, it's not worth what it costs them. But what about cases where there's been no infidelity? Is there ever a time when divorce is justified when neither party has committed adultery per se? Well, Paul speaks about that in 1 Corinthians 7. And it's interesting because Paul tells us something about the teaching of Jesus that we wouldn't have otherwise known, perhaps. Because Paul gives two sets of instructions, one of which he says is repeating what Jesus said.

The other set is that Jesus didn't say anything about this. In other words, Paul says that Jesus spoke to one category of marriage, but there's a category that Jesus didn't address, and Paul's going to go on and address that for us as an inspired apostle. But you see in verse 10, 1 Corinthians 7.10, Paul says, Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord.

This means I didn't originate this. Jesus said this. I'm just telling you again what you probably already know.

Jesus said this. I'm telling you, not I but the Lord, because it's His teaching, not mine. A wife is not to depart from her husband, but even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried and be reconciled to her husband.

And a husband is not to divorce his wife. I just might say that some people, I think, have taken this differently than Paul means. For instance, but if they do depart, let them remain unmarried or be reconciled to their husband.

Some say, well, Paul's in favor of legal separation. Well, maybe there would be some cases where legal separation without divorce would be sensible, like if the husband's violent, if he's dangerous. Clearly, I don't think very many people would say their wife has to stay in a home where she's in danger or where the children are in danger.

I would certainly not. If there was a man who was truly a dangerous man and had given some indication that's the case, I would tell that wife and children, get out of there, get to a safe place. I wouldn't call that grounds for divorce.

I'd say that's grounds for separation. And until he can get it back together and stop doing that, probably the separation should be ongoing. But you're not necessarily divorced and free to go on to another marriage yet, unless there's been adultery too.

But Paul, when he says, let not the wife depart from her husband, but if she does depart, let her stay unmarried or be reconciled, what I think he's saying is he's writing to a church with real situations. He's saying, you married women, don't leave your husband. Oh, some of you already have? Well, okay, you need to either be reconciled to your husband, or if that's not possible, then just stay unmarried.

I don't think he's saying, I'm giving you two options, either stay in the home or leave and remain single. Because leaving and remain single, unless there's extreme circumstances justified, is a breach of covenant. Leaving and not living with your spouse after you promised that you would is a breach of covenant, unless your spouse has given compelling reasons why this is simply the necessary course of action.

And then Paul says this in verse 12, to the rest I, not the Lord say. Now, every commentator in the world will agree with what I'm about to say, and that's not something I can commonly say. It's not very often I can say, yeah, what I'm about to say, most commentators agree with, because in many cases they don't.

But in this case they do. When Paul said, not I, but the Lord say this, he means I'm repeating something the Lord said. Jesus said this in his ministry.

We have the teaching of Jesus on this. But when he says, now I speak, not the Lord, he's not saying I don't have the authority of inspiration, he's saying the Lord Jesus in his life, last time never spoke to this situation, so I'm going to have to add something that is relevant to a situation Jesus never addressed. What is the situation Paul is adding? Christians married to non-Christians.

Now, the reason Jesus never addressed it is because every person that Jesus spoke to was Jewish married to a Jew. Covenant people married to covenant people. God's people married within the faith.

Jesus probably never addressed any marriage where people were married outside their own faith. They were all Jews and all observant. So, Jesus never addressed someone because he probably never met someone who was a Jew married to a pagan or certainly a Christian married to a non-Christian because there weren't really what we call Christians yet.

So, when Paul went out in the Gentile world and evangelized people, sometimes a wife got saved but her husband didn't. They were both pagans when they got married, but now one got saved. Maybe the husband got saved, the wife didn't.

Now, you've got a marriage where one person has come to Christ, the other has not.

Now what? Jesus never encountered that, never spoke of it. So, Paul says, now I'm going to have to give some instructions to the rest.

The rest means these people that he's addressing who are in mixed marriages. They are the rest because they're not the same group that Jesus spoke to. Now, that's an interesting insight that Paul gives.

He distinguishes between people married within the faith and people married outside the faith. And he said, Jesus addressed the ones who are married in the faith and I'm going to have to address those who are not. Which means when we read Matthew 5 or Mark 10 and what Jesus said, Paul tells us he's speaking to people who are married in the same faith.

Even the teaching of Jesus on this was not intended to apply to every case where they're not in the same faith. And that's why Paul said, okay, I'm going to have to go beyond what Jesus said and tell you about this other situation that Jesus didn't address. To the rest, I, not the Lord, say, if any brother has a wife who does not believe, then let him not divorce her.

And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, then let him not divorce her. Sounds like the same thing Jesus said, don't divorce. But Paul goes further and makes a different kind of exception than Jesus made.

He says in verse 15, But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases. Now, he goes on to say, you should try to stay in the marriage because you might be able to win your spouse to Christ.

But if they won't stay, you can't make them stay. Let them go. You're not in bondage.

You enter that marriage through a pagan ceremony anyway. You should keep your word as long as the other party will let you because you as a Christian should be faithful to your word. But if they aren't, then you haven't even been in a Christian marriage anyway.

You're in a pagan marriage to begin with and you became a Christian. If the spouse wants out, let him out. You're not under bondage.

Brother or sister, male or female can be out. In other words, Paul says, in addition to the one reason that Jesus allowed people within the same faith who are married to divorce, and that's through infidelity, there's also another grounds for divorce that only applies when a person is a Christian married to a non-Christian. And that is you can't even divorce if you're a Christian in that situation.

But if they divorce you, well, God doesn't expect you to stay in that marriage obviously. You're not even being given the option. So, there are two situations you may find of

divorced people who are quite legitimately divorced.

But I don't think that legitimately divorced is still desirably divorced. I don't think it's ever desirable to divorce. Even in an abusive marriage, I think it's still better for a woman and her children to go to a safe place and not be divorced.

But so that the children still have a model of faithfulness in their mother. Children pick up their values from their parents initially. And if their parents are seen as someone who bail out and will break their promises, then kids will think that that's something that's okay to do.

A wife who says, Honey, we're going to stay faithful to your dad, but it's not safe to live with him now, but I'm not going to go after other men, that woman is communicating something of great value to her children. And she should be more concerned about what she communicates to her children in this situation than her own convenience. It's very hard.

It's very hard when you've been married and have children to be single. But some people are anyway. A lot of people don't want to be single but are.

The thing is not whether it's easy, but whether God is calling us to do it. And as I understand it, even when your spouse has been unfaithful, you might say, Oh, that's grounds for divorce. And again, people in unhappy marriages, they've confided, I hope she commits adultery so I can get out of this.

Well, no, then you're in a sense in your heart an accomplice to the adultery. You want her to do it. No, if... My first wife did commit adultery numerous times while we were married.

I knew I had grounds for divorce, but I thought there's a higher road to take. If she'll stay with me, I'll stay with her. I'll work on this.

And by the way, we weren't getting anything at home between us. I mean, she was getting it all outside the home. And it was not an easy marriage to be in by any means, but it was my marriage.

I had gotten into it. I had made a mistake, but it was my mistake. And it was mine to own.

And I had made promises that I was going to keep. And I would still be with that woman today, even if nothing improved, if she hadn't eventually run off and divorced me. I would not divorce anyone at gunpoint.

My wife knows that. Fortunately, she's not going to take advantage of that. But I think that even when Jesus said, except for the cause of fornication, He didn't mean the guy or

the woman slipped up once in a weak moment and fell.

I think He's talking about a commitment to sexual infidelity, where the woman is no longer committed to her husband. Now she wants to be with this other guy. I think that's... I mean, Jesus didn't say it like that, but I know that Jesus' commitment is to faithfulness and forgiveness.

And therefore... And I know it's possible to forgive and remain faithful to a husband or a wife who's not being faithful. It's possible. I've been there.

I know. God gives grace. But a spouse who is simply advertised, I don't want this marriage anymore.

I want that person, not you anymore. I'm sleeping with them, not with you. You know, and it's not just a one-night stand.

It's not just they fell in a moment of weakness. It's a... That's the direction they've chosen for themselves. They've chosen to abandon the marriage.

They're saying, I'm done here. That would be a situation where I would certainly give people my full blessing if they were asking for it to divorce, if their spouse had just gone off. But even then, if they said to me, but I'm going to wait for her.

I'm going to be faithful still. I'd say, congratulations. You win the Like Jesus badge, you know.

And that's what really we all are hoping to win. You win the Like Jesus badge.