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Divorce and Remarriage (Part 1)



Toward a Radically Christian Counterculture - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg emphasizes the need for Christians to adhere strictly to what the Bible teaches regarding divorce and remarriage. He argues that churches must not compromise their moral standards in order to accommodate societal norms. Gregg cautions against taking a lenient approach to divorce, emphasizing the importance of keeping vows made before God. Finally, he challenges Christians to prioritize their faithfulness to God over temporal desires, and to recognize that not all flaws in a marriage should be considered grounds for divorce.

Transcript

We've been talking about how a radically Christian counterculture is, among other things, a culture of families. And that in an increasing measure, the dominant secular culture of our society is a culture of individuals. schools.

We see this probably nowhere more than in the trends of divorce and remarriage in the modern culture because, well, I mean, we've all heard the statistics. We've heard for a long time that the statistic is something like 50% of the people in the United States who get married also get divorced. And a lot of people who get divorced end up getting remarried.

We heard recently that the most recent statistic was that this rate is even worse among Christians, that even greater than 50% of Christian marriages end in divorce, which is not only astonishing but absolutely a reproach to the gospel. It's a reproach to Christ. It's a terrible testimony.

And it's evidence of a very spiritually anemic and disobedient church. Divorce is a subject that is controversial in the church. And a lot of different positions are taken by those who call themselves evangelicals.

And when I say who call themselves evangelicals, I don't mean to suggest that any of these people are not really evangelicals. It's just that there's a broad umbrella of persons who regard themselves under the title of evangelical. Those would be those who believe that the Bible is the Word of God and that we ought to be directing our steps and making

decisions based on what God has revealed in His Word.

In that sense, I hope all of us here are evangelicals, and there are many in this country. But not all who are evangelicals agree as to what the Word of God says on this subject. There are those who make a strong emphasis on grace as leniency.

I say grace as leniency because obviously you can't take too strong a position on grace as taught in the Bible. It is good that the soul be established in grace, the writer of Hebrews said. And there's no question but that all that we receive from God is of grace.

And if we don't understand the grace of God, we are doomed to become legalistic and Pharisaic and not only unhappy people but hurting other people and misrepresenting God. And it's very important that we emphasize grace. But there's a trend in some sectors of the church to interpret grace as leniency.

Now, grace is not leniency. God is not lenient. To say that one is lenient means that they are not very concerned about obedience.

Somebody who is lenient means that if their child disobeys, well, it's no big deal. God is not lenient in that sense. Disobedience is a big deal.

God has judged whole societies in a very gruesome manner because of disobedience. He has judged nations. He has judged individuals.

Throughout the Scripture, God makes it very clear that obedience is a big issue with Him. To say He makes an issue of obedience and He's not lenient, however, does not change the fact that He's gracious. And to say that one is gracious is a different thing because God is very much gracious without being lenient.

He does not consider disobedience a small matter. But He considers it a matter that He can forgive if the disobedient party repents. But even that is not at a small price to Him.

Of course, He had to sacrifice His Son in order even to be able to do that. So we know the grace of God is important, but we must make sure that we do not fall into the trap that Jude refers to. Jude says, there are many who have crept into the church unaware, slipped in sideways, I think the Greek actually says, through the cracks and have infiltrated the church.

And Jude tells us these people turned the grace of God into licentiousness. And the word licentiousness means license, permission to sin. And there are many today in the church who turn the word grace into the concept of license to sin.

And among those who do so, the view about divorce and remarriages is characteristic of their views in general. They're very lenient. And they realize that divorce is not ideal and that people really shouldn't get divorced if they can help it.

But when they find that people are really unhappy in their marriage and maybe they don't have any grounds for divorce, biblically speaking, but it's really a sad thing to see how unhappy the marriage is. Some pastors even will say in such cases, well, I think it's time to consider divorce here. Or they also take an equally lenient view toward remarriage when people have wrongly divorced in the past.

On the other end of the spectrum, there are those who are reacting to that leniency. And there are those who say, listen, the church is losing its testimony because of this rampant, easy divorce that's simply countenanced in the church. And it's destroying families.

It's destroying the testimony of the church. And they're right. And so they take a pendulum swing from the total leniency to a total intolerance of any divorce.

And if divorce occurs, intolerance of remarriage. And in this, they feel that they are taking the radically Christian position. They are about as far from the dominant culture.

And they're thinking about divorce as a person can be. And that is considered to be radically Christian. To me, radically Christian means something more than just being as opposite to the dominant culture as you can be.

Being radically Christian means that you go exactly by what Jesus teaches and what the Bible teaches in general. It is not more radically Christian to take a view that is more extreme on a subject than that of Christ. To be holy above that which is written.

To be more spiritual than Jesus. And yet, there is that position that I think some Christians have taken. Now, between the position of total tolerance and leniency on the one hand, and the position of total restrictiveness and intolerance on the other hand, there is actually, I believe, what the Bible teaches to be found there.

And the Christian who wants to live by the Word of God has got to settle it in his conscience and in his own mind of what the Bible teaches on this. You might say, well, why should I care? I'm not going to divorce my wife. I'm not going to divorce my husband.

We've got a good, strong marriage. And even if we didn't, we don't believe in divorce. So, why do I need to look into this? Everyone here knows somebody, and I would even narrow that down, knows some Christian couple that is currently contemplating divorce.

Or, if not currently contemplating divorce, have already divorced and are considering remarriage. Anyone here doesn't know any Christians like that? It's okay if you raise your hand. I'd be surprised, but that's okay.

I'd be relieved. I'd be relieved to find that someone doesn't know someone like that. I don't see any hands.

This is an astonishing thing. Now, you might say, well, my marriage is stable. Fine.

Great. I'm glad it is. I hope it remains so.

And by the grace of God, there's every reason to believe it can. But even if your marriage is not in danger of divorce, you probably know somebody who will seek your counsel or your approval about some decision they're going to make on this subject. And you need to know how to give God's counsel or take God's position on this.

And as it turns out, of course, I've already indicated that I don't stand at either of the two extreme poles. And for that reason, the position I believe is biblical and that I'll be teaching is going to be regarded by some at one end of the spectrum as I'm too lenient, too easy on divorce. And by people on the other end of the spectrum, as I'm too strict, I'm unreasonable.

I myself have a divorce in my past and I remarried. So obviously, I don't believe that all divorce and remarriage is wrong. And I remember when years ago, I was being considered for a position of eldership in a church that I didn't even care to be an elder in, but the pastor was desperate for elders and he asked me if I'd serve.

And they asked for the congregational feedback. And actually, not only I, but a couple of the other guys who were considered for eldership had divorces in their past. Now, none of us had remarried at this time.

We were all still single, but we had divorces in our past. All of us had been abandoned by unfaithful wives. And yet, there were some in the church who were concerned.

And I appreciate their concern. They said, you know, do you really want someone who's divorced to be in eldership? Consider this. What if someone comes to them for marital counseling? Because they're elders, they might come for counseling.

Wouldn't these men who have been divorced be in danger of taking more of a light view of divorce? The people who said that have never been through divorce. I don't see how anybody who's ever been the victim of a divorce could take anywhere near as light a view of divorce as a person who has not been through one. A person who's never been through a divorce has the luxury of imagining what kind of a meat grinder it is.

The person who's been through a divorce doesn't have to imagine. They've been ground up. Now, of course, if the persons have been the initiators of the divorce, it may well be that there's something very wrong with their character, depending on what grounds were upon which they sought the divorce.

But we have to remember that not everyone who's divorced wanted to be. Not everybody who's divorced is guilty of something in particular in causing the divorce. And while some people say, well, there's never really an innocent party, it's a misnomer to

talk about the innocent party.

Because even the more innocent party has many things that they do that irritate or aggravate the situation in their marriage. And when the divorce takes place, no one can say they were wholly innocent to the matter. Well, insofar as nobody can claim to be perfect, it's true.

Nobody can say that they've done nothing to make their marriage more difficult for their partner. Everybody, no doubt, has done something that makes the marriage more difficult for their partner. But that's a very different thing than saying they are responsible for the divorce.

Because every marriage I'm aware of, even marriages that will never end in divorce, have irritants within them. Both parties find some things about the other person, something they need to adjust to, something they don't naturally like. That doesn't mean they've given someone grounds for divorce.

You know, grounds for divorce is one thing in the scripture. And short of that, the person who does not do that, does not give their partner grounds for divorce, and if their partner seeks a divorce without it, there is an innocent party. Maybe not wholly innocent.

I will say this. The wife that I used to have, who was an adulteress, repeated adulteress, and finally she left me, I would not divorce her, she divorced me and I ran off. After I was divorced by her, I could see many things I had done wrong in the marriage.

I could see many things where I'd been an imperfect husband. But I still would call myself the innocent party in that divorce. I mean, even if I had done more irritating things than she did, which is not the case, but the fact of the matter is, the person who seeks the divorce, or the person who commits adultery, is the person who is guilty of breaking up the marriage, not the person who simply was not pleasant.

Anyway, we need to talk about this, because you will, if your own marriage doesn't ever face crises in this era, you will certainly be in the position, unless you die very quickly, before you die, you'll have opportunity to meet people. Many of them will be telling you, well, we're going to get a divorce, or I'm divorced, but I'm thinking about remarrying, and so forth. And if you don't know what the Bible says on it, you will not be in the position to really give biblical counsel.

And many churches, unfortunately, don't seem to be in that position to give biblical counsel, or don't have the backbone to do so. You may remember back in 1997, Dan Quayle made a speech called the Murphy Brown speech, where he criticized the television show Murphy Brown, because it featured a single woman who decided to get pregnant and have a baby, and seemed to, you know, tend to glamorize single motherhood, deliberate single motherhood, and so forth. And Dan Quayle made a

speech, which he got a lot of flack for, from the media, where he basically said, it's not good.

Single motherhood is not a good thing. It's not good to encourage this. And he was, you know, blasted by the media for saying things like that.

But a few months later, in Atlantic Monthly, there came an article out, which said, Dan Quayle is right. Now, I'm not so concerned about the Murphy Brown speech or Dan Quayle being right about that. I don't think, obviously, he was right.

But the woman who wrote that article for Atlantic Monthly was a woman named Barbara Defoe Whitehead. And her article got a lot of publicity, because basically, she cited statistics that proved that what he had said was right, that for people to have babies or raise children in a broken home or out of wedlock, it's not good. It's not good for society.

It's not good for the kids. It's not good for anybody. And so, she pretty much vindicated Dan Quayle.

Well, a little later, she wrote a book, and it's called The Divorce Culture. And she was interviewed back in 1997 by Christianity Today. And I wanted to just read a little bit of what she said.

What caught my attention was her book's title is The Divorce Culture. I'm talking about culture here. We're talking about counterculture.

And it's interesting that she would refer to our dominant culture in our nation as the divorce culture. It might seem strange to take something as marginal to most people's lives as divorce and make that a defining term for the dominant culture. But when you think about it, if 50 percent or more of the persons who get married in our culture are getting divorced, I guess it is a divorce culture.

And she brought out that it's not much better in the churches either. She was a Roman Catholic, and she did not write as an evangelical. It wasn't published by a Christian publisher.

She wrote a secular book on the subject, but obviously talking about the need to change the divorce culture. But something that she said in her interview in Christianity Today, I thought I might share with you. She was asked by the interviewer, how have the churches responded to our divorce culture? And she said, in many ways, churches have followed the divorce culture.

They have not been countercultural, but have accepted the secular assumptions. This shows up in the preaching, in the religious education, and in the places churches put their effort. There is a feeling among clergy that to speak frankly about marriage is to be judgmental and unsupportive of all the people sitting in the pews who are divorced.

This means those who have the most to say about the commitments of marriage are keeping silent. After I spoke, she says, to a mainly evangelical audience, a woman came up to me and said, I'm a Baptist, and I go to church. My husband left our marriage because he met someone he liked better.

She left her marriage because she liked my husband. My husband married this woman, and they broke up two marriages involving five children, and now they go to my church. They sit in a certain pew at church, and I sit there too, next to my kids, and my church doesn't have anything to say about the right and wrong of their actions.

Now, if this was an isolated case, I wouldn't even bother to read it. It would just be one of those shock value stories that really are so rare that what's the point of even paying attention? Exceptions that prove the rule or something. However, on my radio broadcast, I get calls all the time from people who have exactly the same experience.

The person calling me is usually the one who has been abandoned by a spouse. In many cases, the spouse and their new paramour or whatever are attending the church with them, and the church won't say anything. Usually, the caller is saying, well, what should I do? I say, well, you got to get the pastor to speak to them about this.

And they say, well, I talked to the pastor. He doesn't want to say anything to them. And this is so often the case.

I would say this is probably more the case in evangelical churches today than not. And with such a high percentage of people getting divorced, and most of those getting remarried, and many of them evangelicals going to church, there must be thousands of cases like this across the country. And can you imagine what a reproach that is? A man and his mistress, as it were.

Sure, they're married in the sight of the state, but in the sight of God, she's his mistress, according to Jesus. So, a man and his harlot are going to church along with his legitimate wife. And the kids are there, too, seeing all of it.

This is something that the church should be greatly ashamed about. And, of course, it goes along with what we've been saying throughout this entire series. The church needs to not try to blend in with the dominant culture, but needs to find what the distinctives are of the church's calling and message.

What is it that Jesus has said for us to be and do? And we need to do that. And we need to do it faithfully so that the world will at least still have a witness for Christ and for Christianity when the churches have abandoned that witness. Now, what is at stake? If we do not take a right position about divorce, what is at stake? Well, on one hand, we may take too severe a position about divorce and remarriage.

If we take that too severe approach, more severe than God does, let us say, then what

we will end up doing is dividing the church over an issue that God does not want the church dividing over. In other words, there will be people who won't fellowship at certain churches because there are divorced and remarried people there. And they'll say, well, that's adultery.

Divorce and remarriage is adultery. And there are many Christians these days, a growing number, who seem to think that that is true, that the Bible says whenever people are divorced and remarried, regardless of the circumstances, that's adultery. Well, obviously, Paul tells us we can't fellowship with those who commit adultery and who call themselves Christians.

Paul said that in 1 Corinthians 5. He says, I don't expect you to avoid all the sinners in the world. You can't leave the world. But if anyone calls himself a brother and is a fornicator or a drunkard or any of those things, he says, don't even eat with them.

Don't have anything to do with them. So, actually, if we take a position that's more severe than God's, then we end up saying these people are in adultery and I cannot fellowship with them biblically. The problem is what if they're not? What if our position is more strict than God's is? Then what we are doing is we are calling that unclean, which God has cleansed.

Just like Peter didn't want to go into the house of a Gentile, didn't want to eat the unclean animals, and God said, listen, I've cleansed them. Don't you call unclean what I've cleansed. We can be guilty of that if we take a view more strict than that of God.

On the other hand, of course, if we take a too lenient a view, it's even more damaging, probably. After all, it's damaging enough if there's some who won't fellowship with people who legitimately should be fellowshiped with, but at least they'll always find enough people who will. But what about if we take too lenient a view and we allow divorce and remarriage without any criticism on grounds the Bible does not allow? Well, here's what's at stake.

First of all, the purity and the testimony of the church is at stake because this is not just a non-moral issue. Where divorce and remarriage are legitimate, if there are such cases, then it's, of course, morally clean, but where it is illegitimate, it's not just something that's undesirable, it is adultery. It is adultery.

Where there is divorce and remarriage and it's not legitimate in the sight of God, it is adultery. The Bible says adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. They can go to church all they want, but they won't go to heaven.

I'd rather go to heaven than go to church, frankly. And therefore, the purity of the church will be compromised and the testimony of the church will be compromised if the church simply takes a lazy approach to this and says, well, who am I to judge? They were so

unhappy before and look, this all happened before they came to our church anyway. Who are we to say anything? The church has to have more backbone than that.

It's got to stand for Jesus Christ and what he taught. And to take a view that's too light about divorce and remarriage is a sin for the church to do and it compromises the church's testimony and its purity. It also, of course, endangers the sanctity of marriage.

To suggest that if a person breaks up with his wife and marries another woman, that's no more shocking to the church than if a teenager breaks up with his girlfriend and gets another girlfriend later. And that's really about the way most churches handle it. It's just about as tolerable.

Then it means that marriage isn't a sacred thing. It's not a unique thing. The church doesn't have any testimony about marriage, doesn't have any position about marriage.

And that's the one area, probably more than any other moral issue in society, where the church needs to be able to speak with a clear voice to a culture that is totally lost and doesn't know anything about this. Another thing that's at stake if we take too light a view of divorce and remarriage, and the church has no business taking such a view, is the security of children's rights to be raised by both parents. God intends for children to be raised by both of their original parents.

Now, of course, God has the power to change that. One parent can die. Or some circumstances, I believe that the Bible prescribes, can result in a legitimate breakup of the couple.

Legitimate on the side of one party, not on the side of the other. But the fact is that apart from these less than ideal situations, God wants and God knows that children need to have both their original parents. And that children who are raised with one of those original parents out of the home, generally do not fare as well as just individuals in society.

I mean, there are exceptions, but on average, the statistics show they don't fare as well socially. A lot of times, even economically, a lot more of them become criminals. I'm not trying to overly stereotype this.

This is what the statistics show. Among people in prison, an overly, a disproportionately high percentage of them grew up in single-parent homes or in homes with a step-parent. They didn't have their natural parent with them.

In society, it might be 50%. In prison, it might be 95%. Those aren't the exact statistics, but it's enormous.

It's very clear that children are not made to be raised in homes that don't have both of their parents in them. Now, sometimes they have to. There are situations, like I said, that

are subnormal.

We have to be willing to recognize those and say, okay, this is what it's got to be. But when we are light on the subject of divorce, then people who just get tired of each other get divorced. They're not thinking about their kids at that time.

And God is. And Jesus said, if somebody causes one of these little ones who believes in me to stumble, it is better for that person if they had a millstone put around their neck and then be thrown into the depths of the sea and drowned. Now, that doesn't sound like a very pleasant way to die, but Jesus said it's a lot more pleasant than what you'll get if you cause one of these little ones to stumble.

It'd be better for you to have that kind of death, He said, than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. And everyone who seeks a divorce unnecessarily or breaks up a family without biblical grounds is certainly taking the risk that they are stumbling their children in one way or another. That risk has to be taken in some unusual circumstances, but it is something that should not be taken lightly at all.

Another thing that is at stake here is the stability of society's most fundamental element, the family. As soon as a family is not something that has the bond of a covenantal, unbreachable relationship as its foundation, then society doesn't have anything to keep it stable. If covenantal relationships between a man and wife aren't stable, are not safe, then no one's integrity is.

It's an amazing thing to me how many people who run businesses divorce their wives and then expect their customers to trust them as honest people. Why? What's amazing to me is how many people do trust them as honest people. They're gullible, they're naive.

If a man can't keep a solemn vow made before God and a room full of witnesses to his wife, why would anyone expect him to keep a verbal promise he made to a business client or something? Why should he? The man has no integrity. And the same thing goes for a woman. If a woman will break her vows to her husband, again vows that are made in a public place, usually a large room full of people, God is invoked as witness to all that, and that person decides eventually, it's too hard to keep this vow, I'm out of here.

Well, that person has no character, no integrity and shouldn't be trusted ever again until they change. And that change should be something where they actually acknowledge that they did the wrong thing at the very least. Now, what's wrong with divorce besides the fact that all these things are at stake in it? Divorce is a criminal act.

Divorce is at least a criminal act in the sight of God. There's never a right divorce. Now, I said earlier that sometimes people who are divorced are innocent of it.

I believe that. But there's never a divorce where both parties are innocent. There's never

what's called a no-fault divorce.

In the sight of God. That's very common in our day. You know, no one really wants to wait for their partner to commit adultery anymore.

They want to just say, listen, you're okay, I'm okay, but we just don't get along. There ain't no good guy, there ain't no bad guy, there's only you and me and we just don't agree. And so, we're just going to get out of here, right? And so, it's a no-fault thing.

We'll just have an amicable agreement. We'll both get lawyers, we'll talk it out friendly over the table, and you know, no big accusations. No big accusations going either way, let's just be friends and break it off and so forth.

And that's how many divorces end today. Because our culture has decided there is such a thing as a no-fault divorce. In some cases, no one's guilty of anything, it's just not right.

The marriage just isn't right. They made a mistake. Everyone makes mistakes.

They should be able to get another chance, is the way our society thinks. But that's not true. There is no such thing as a no-fault divorce, because if there is a legitimate divorce, it is because one party committed adultery, and that's not okay.

And if there's an illegitimate divorce, because one party didn't commit adultery, then the seeking of the illegitimate divorce is not okay. It's tantamount to adultery itself. You just can't break up a marriage once it's been formed, without one party doing something heinous that is enough to keep them from the Kingdom of God.

Because anyone who is an adulterer, the Bible says, will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Now, I understand. Many are saying, well, wait a minute, what about, you know, I committed adultery back when I was younger, before I was a Christian, or maybe, you know, sometime back there, but does that mean I can't inherit the Kingdom of God? Repentant people are not adulterers.

If you committed adultery when you were younger, and repented, you're not an adulterer. And therefore, that adulterer should not inherit the Kingdom of God doesn't apply to you. But, the question is, are you repentant? If a person divorces his wife and marries another, that's adultery, Jesus said.

Well, have they repented? And what does it look like when they do? What happens to this second marriage that is really not a marriage in God's sight, but adultery? What happens to it when they repent? We need to consider those things, because, you know, the church is facing, I don't know that our church is at this moment, but the church in the United States is certainly facing several problems. One, there are members of the churches who are considering divorce. We all know some of them.

Two, there are people in the churches who have already divorced, sometimes under very questionable conditions, and are seeking the church to bless a second marriage. They want to go into a second marriage, and they want the church to bless it. And third, there are people who come to the church, they've already had a divorce, and they're already remarried, and it may be that their divorce was very illegitimate, and their remarriage may have been illegitimate, but now they're coming to the church saying, hey, let bygones be bygones, we want to be members of the church.

What should the church do? Well, the church has to decide, first of all, is this adultery or not? And if it is, what does repentance look like? Because we can't have people who are claiming to be Christians who are committing adultery on an ongoing basis in the church. Well, adultery is a crime, it's never okay. I mean, some people can be divorced under certain grounds without being guilty, but that doesn't mean the divorce was okay, because the very thing that made the divorce okay for that person meant that that person did something that was extremely not okay.

And therefore, God is offended by every divorce. Not always defended by both parties in the divorce, but every divorce involves a grievous offense of God. What divorce is at the root is a violation of a covenant and a vow made to God.

Marriage is established by two parties making a covenantal vow of lifelong faithfulness to each other. There are very few things that can legitimately erase the obligation that comes with making such a vow. But people take vows very lightly in our day and age, and they think of a vow as something a little bit like a business contract, and if they can get both parties to agree to dissolution of the contract, that's fine.

Well, no, that's true with a contract, it's not true with a covenant. A covenant isn't just the same thing as a contract. A covenant is something that is solemnly made a promise before God, which even if both parties to it say, you know, we made a mistake, maybe we should get out of this, God doesn't agree, and God's the one who the promise is made to.

And that is why we can't allow for the breaking up of marriages as lightly as is done in our society. In Ecclesiastes 5, we have one of many places where God tells us the importance of keeping vows that we make to Him. In Ecclesiastes 5, verses 4 through 7, it says, 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. Don't say, I made a mistake, I shouldn't have made this vow, I think I want to get out of this.

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 is also vanity, but fear God. Now, as I say, there is one of several places in the Bible that talk about the importance of keeping one's vows, if they make vows at all. Vows, you don't have to make any vows.

The Bible makes it very clear. It's better not to vow at all, than to vow and not keep it. Note, the Bible never commands anyone to make any vows, but if you're not going to make any vows, you're not going to get married.

Because marriage is sealed with a vow. And once you've made that vow, you don't break that vow. Period.

God's not wishy-washy about this matter. Fear God. Why should God destroy you, He says.

God has no pleasure in fools. Don't make hasty vows. And if you have made one, keep it anyway.

Because you made a vow. It says in Psalm 15 that the person that God will receive and will retain in His presence, among other things, is the person who swears to his own hurt and does not change. That means they make a vow.

They swear to do something. And it is to their own hurt. That means they discover after they've done it that it's going to hurt.

It's going to cost them more than they anticipated. To keep this vow. But they don't change.

That's who God honors, it says in Psalm 15, 4 or 5, somewhere there. He that swears to his own hurt but does not change. I believe that in some measure, not an equal measure with all people, but in some measure, all people who marry swear to their own hurt.

And I don't mean to suggest a cynical view of marriage in general, but simply that when you vow to marry the person you marry, almost never do you know everything about them that you will know. And almost always your view of them is a little rosier, a little more positive than it will be after you've lived with them for a while because you're going to discover things about them that are the imperfections that you either didn't know about or that you did know about and you didn't think they'd matter before you married them. And then you get married and you live with them year after year and you think, this matters.

Why didn't I think this would matter? This bugs me. I mean, some marriages are very happy and some people don't have very many causes of irritation between them. I've known couples who've lived for many, actually decades together and they say, and I believe them, they've never had a fight.

That's wonderful. But there aren't many like that. And most people, when they marry, are making a vow to stay faithful to somebody that they don't know half as well as they will after they've married them.

And what they will find out about their spouse after they marry them will not all be pretty stuff. It won't all be really what they'd hoped. It won't be, you know, the person is not so much the person of their dreams as they thought it may be.

And if that is so, they have sworn to their own hurt. And what is the obligation? They change not. They don't back down on their vow.

To break a vow is perjury. In a court of law, if you perjure yourself, you take an oath to tell the truth and so help you God, and you lie. That's a punishable offense at law.

And how much more so before God. In addition to the fact that divorce is an offense to God because it cheats Him. Basically, the person who is willing to seek a divorce without grounds is willing to say, God, I don't mind lying to You.

I know what I said I'd do to You, but I've just changed my mind. I don't mind making myself a liar in Your sight. He doesn't have any pleasure in people like that.

Well, what does it do to people? Divorce always leaves a string of human victims in its wake too. Sometimes not as many, if there's no children, for example. But there's always some.

God's always a victim of every divorce. You can't have a no-victim divorce because God is victimized when the vows that are made to Him are broken by people. He's cheated.

He's robbed. But there are other victims too in most cases. When you divorce your spouse without grounds, you have stolen from them.

You've stolen the years of their youth. If you marry someone and let's say ten years later you divorce them. Let's say they were 22 when you married and they're 32 when you divorce them.

There's ten of the best years of your life you took from them and they won't be able to give that to someone else who might be more faithful than you. You have robbed them. And they wouldn't have given it to you if you hadn't promised to do something that you're not willing to do.

You're a cheat. You're a thief. It also steals their innocence because many people when they marry are still virgins.

And when virginity is taken from somebody, they can never get that back. I know notwithstanding some of the things that guests on James Dobson's program talk about having your spiritual virginity restored. I don't read about that in the Bible.

I think, Virginia, you give that up one time and you don't get another chance. And the person who takes that from you should consider that adequate reason to stay with you no matter how difficult they find it forever afterwards because the next person that they leave you to, if they leave you, will not be able to have that and you won't be able to have it back. You can't be as innocent as you were.

You know, I was a virgin when I got married the first time. And when my wife divorced me, I lost a great deal of innocence by being married. I lost my virginity for one thing.

But the innocence that was lost with that is something too. And I'm not saying that when married couples give up their virginity for each other that that's a guilty thing. It's just that I'm talking more about the cleanness, the naivety, the sexual innocence and so forth that a person has beforehand.

They don't have that anymore. Even if they stay single, they live more of a, I think they have more of a jaded life. I'm not saying, I don't mean that they're morally corrupt.

I'm just saying that they don't have that same innocence that they had before and that is something that you can't give anyone back. Once you take it, you have to keep it. It robs them of their privacy.

So does dating, by the way. I remember many times, you know, when I was interested perhaps in marrying somebody and got to know them a bit and then didn't end up marrying them. And one reason I don't recommend dating at all is partly because of this factor.

I always felt like, you know, I'd always told them so many of my secrets. Told them so many things about me that I don't tell people generally. And then they're gone and they take that with them.

How much more if they were my wife or husband? How much more do they find out? How much more my privacy is invested in them? And then they leave and take it with them. That's cheating. That is grand larceny.

That's theft. Another thing that you rob a person of if you divorce them illegitimately is of their forfeited options for personal happiness and the natural deep-seated human hope of sharing life and children with a lifelong partner. That is to say, when that woman married you or that man married you, he would not have done so, she would not have done so if they didn't cherish the hope that this would be a lifelong relationship, this family can bear children, raise children together, have a lifelong relationship where they grow old together.

And, you know, now you say, well, I don't know, a lot of people don't have those expectations when they marry. Well, shame on them. They don't know what marriage is then.

They shouldn't get married if they don't know what marriage is. They ought to be educated. But many people still know what marriage is, and that's exactly what they expect and have every right to expect when they marry.

And if they'd known that person was going to run out on them in 10 or 15 years, they wouldn't have wasted their time on that person. By promising something and then not delivering, you cheat people in immeasurable ways. And that brings us to another thing that makes divorce such a criminal thing, and that is that it... What's the right word for this? It puts upon a great number of people incalculable emotional pain.

No one can quantify the emotional pain that a person feels when their spouse has committed adultery and they find out. Or when you've been faithful to your spouse and your spouse divorces you and ends up with somebody else. The pain on the jilted spouse.

The pain on the children. The pain on the parents. The parents of the married couple and their friends.

When you hear of people that you love, couples that you've been close with, you hear they get divorced. Can you measure the amount of pain and anguish you feel over that news when you hear it? No. And you're a bystander.

Imagine how the relatives and the children and the spouse and everyone feel. The amount of pain that is inflicted upon people through this is far greater than any of the pain one would inflict on oneself by staying in the marriage no matter how hard it is. And there's also a great deal of economic cost to it too.

Generally speaking, if a man leaves his wife and she keeps the children, on average they end up with a greatly reduced standard of living than they had with the father in the home. If it's the wife that runs off on him, he usually has to support her, at least the children. And yet he doesn't have the joy of having the family that he's paying for.

It's just all cheap, cheap, cheap. It's theft. And I can't understand how anyone, even non-Christians, could look upon this thing and say anything other than, this is an atrocity.

Every divorce is an atrocity. And then to see that the church doesn't have anything to say about it. That is an atrocity.

The church, any church that will not stand against divorce in a biblical manner, I think forfeits all right to be called a church. And any pastor who doesn't address this matter when it is in the church, when there is violation in the church, if it doesn't get addressed, that pastor should be defrocked of any credentials to be a pastor. Because he is tolerating adultery, he's tolerating perjury, he's tolerating theft.

I mean, if the love of money is at the root of all kinds of evil, divorce is the cause of all

kinds of evil as well. Well, I take a pretty hard line against divorce. Not as hard as some people take.

But I don't think I take any harder than one should. I think the church should be ashamed of not taking at least that hard a line about divorce. But when we do take a hard line about divorce, we need to realize some things that kind of soften the approach a little bit legitimately from the Bible.

Because once we say divorce is intolerable, divorce is criminal, divorce is an atrocity, suddenly when you meet somebody, you find out they're divorced, you might think immediately, you might think badly of them. Ah, they're guilty of divorce. Well, maybe they are.

Maybe they're not. There are divorces that take place where both parties are equally guilty. I've known them.

I've known couples that both went out and committed adultery, they both ruined their marriage, they both agreed to get a divorce and take up with other people. There are divorces where both people are really, truly guilty, equally guilty. But I don't think that's the majority.

I think the majority of divorces, there's one party who's really guilty and the other person who's really victimized, really hurt, really would not have divorced. I mean, in my own case, and I don't want to harp on my own case too much, but I mean, my first wife actually had committed adultery with a number of men. And I knew it.

She confessed it to me. She hadn't repented, but she wasn't secretive about it. She let me know.

We had a terrible marriage. Divorce crossed my mind from time to time, but at the same time, I felt like God would not be glorified in my seeking a divorce. I knew I had grounds, but it's one thing to say you can do it legitimately.

It's another thing to say it's what God really wants, or what would really glorify God. And I determined I'd stay married for the rest of my life to this person, even if nothing ever changed. And God was merciful.

She ran off and she divorced me. She did what I would never have done, and it's the mercy of God, because I'd still be married to her today otherwise. And she'd probably have a long list of paramours longer than we could count.

In fact, when I married her, she couldn't count how many she'd had before that, before she was converted, if she was. But the fact is there are people who are committed to keeping their marriage together, and regardless of what they do, their spouse will not allow it to happen. And when that happens, you need to make sure that you don't just

broad brush everyone who's been through a divorce and say, well, they're all adulterers.

That's not true. A divorce, in many cases, may be unilateral. That is, it's the action of one person against the other.

Just like if a person gets mugged, a mugging requires two people, the mugger and the mugged. Do we say, oh, this person was involved in a mugging. No, we don't want them in our church.

It turns out they're the one who got mugged, but, well, it doesn't matter. Mugging is bad. We don't believe in mugging.

We don't want any mugged people here. Well, there are people who are victims of divorce, just like there are people who are victims of mugging. We better be careful about how we deal with them.

Jesus, I think, knows, and we need to try to discern what God's feelings are toward the individuals involved. Some are guilty and some are not. Another thing to remember is that biblically, vows, though they are exceedingly solemn, are not always unconditionally binding.

You might remember in Genesis chapter 24 where Abraham sent his servant to Haran to find a wife for Isaac, and he made him take a solemn vow that he would not take Isaac back to Haran, but he'd keep him there and he'd bring a wife to him and vowed to do this. It was as solemn as any vow. There was even a routine they went through which was characteristic of the culture to solemnize it.

And the servant said to Abraham, well, what if the woman won't come back with me? Should I bring your son there to marry her there? And Abraham says, no, don't at all take my son out of this land to go there. But he says, if the woman doesn't agree to come with you, then you're free from your vow. Now, the guy just made a solemn vow that such and such would happen, but if he couldn't keep it, if there was no way to do so because of the other party's unwillingness, then Abraham said, well, you're free from your vow.

There are times when even a solemn vow, because of extenuating circumstances, can be legitimately... a person can be released from it. In Numbers chapter 30, we're told that if a woman takes a vow before God, which under ordinary circumstances, you've got to keep your vows, no matter what they were and no matter who it was that made them. But if she's a young woman, unmarried in her father's house, her father, upon hearing of her vow, can annul it within one day of hearing it.

If he doesn't on the same day, then it's binding. But he can annul her vow, even though it's a vow before God. Ordinarily, she'd have to keep it, but it can be annulled because she made it without her father's consent.

Same thing is true of a married woman and her husband. Her husband can annul her vow, it says, in Numbers chapter 30. There is a general teaching of Scripture.

It has to do with God's dealings and God is the model that we follow. That even very solemn promises and oaths and so forth that are made, generally speaking, have an escape vow. They have, in a sense, a condition that if the other party doesn't keep the vow, there is a release available to the person who is victimized by that.

In Jeremiah chapter 18, we find that God talks about how He is in general when He makes promises. In Jeremiah 18, verses 7-10, He says, The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to pluck it up and pull it down and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will repent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. Nineveh would be a good example of that.

God said He was going to destroy Nineveh. They repented. He repented of the disaster He said to bring upon it.

Then, verse 9, And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to build and to plant it, now He only did that with one nation in history that we know of and that was Israel. So, He is talking about Israel. He says, when I make a promise and I say I'm going to build and plant this nation, this is my covenant I make with them.

When I say I'm going to do that, if that nation does evil in my sight so that it does not obey my voice, then I will repent concerning the good which I said I would do to benefit it. What He is saying is even Israel whom He has made these promises to, if they violate Him, if they turn from Him and do evil, He says He will repent of the promises He made to them. Now, His promises to them were of a covenantal sort.

They were solemn vows. But He said, hey, it's conditional. It's conditional.

But that doesn't mean that every misdeed done by Israel would be grounds for God to break His promises to them. And it certainly would mean that not every flaw in a husband or a wife becomes grounds for divorce. There would be very strict defining of what might be or might not be.

But we have to recognize that just because marriage is sealed with vows, it doesn't mean that there are no circumstances under which one party can be freed from the other. There are some circumstances, I believe. The Bible indicates that.

And that when a person is freed from it, remarriage is an option open to them. Turn with me to Deuteronomy chapter 24. This is the earliest direct teaching in the Bible on divorce.

There's earlier teaching that's indirect. And that is what Jesus appealed to when He was asked about divorce. He appealed to Genesis chapter 2 which is really a teaching about

marriage and He made application to divorce.

But the first direct teaching in the Bible about divorce is the opening verses of Deuteronomy 24. It says, When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled. For that's an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God has given you as an inheritance.

Now, there are a number of lessons that have been drawn from this passage, but not the least of which is the fact that it seems to teach that when a divorce has taken place, if it's a legitimate divorce in the sight of God, remarriage is a possibility. The second marriage of this woman is not stigmatized. What is stigmatized is if she would go back to her first husband after her second husband died or divorced her.

She couldn't do that. And he couldn't take her back. But it takes for granted that a woman who has been put away by her husband would probably get remarried.

Not much else she could do in that society to get along or survive unless her father is still alive and she can go back home. But it does indicate that God allowed divorce in some cases and remarriage where there was divorce. Now, in some cases, it says if a man has taken a wife and she finds no favor in his eyes because he's found some uncleanness in her.

Now, this uncleanness is very vague in the Old Testament. And that led the rabbis to speculate a great deal as to what kind of uncleanness might constitute grounds for divorce. And there were different opinions among the rabbis.

They didn't all agree. There were two schools in particular about a generation before Jesus came to earth. There was a school under a rabbi named Shammai.

And there was another school of rabbis under a man named Hillel. These were the two leading rabbis in their generation. And they had disciples who pretty much followed their teaching.

And Shammai taught that a man could divorce his wife for anything that bothered him about her. If she got old and unattractive and he met somebody he was more attracted to, well, then that's some uncleanness in her. He can divorce her for that.

If she was a bad housekeeper or she had a bad disposition or something, that was some uncleanness. He could divorce her for that according to Shammai. I'm sorry.

That's according to Hillel. My mistake. Hillel is the one who said that.

Shammai, on the other hand, took the position that a man could not divorce his wife unless she had been sexually unfaithful. In other words, these men had different opinions of what uncleanness meant. The Bible clearly said that if a man found uncleanness in his wife, he could give her a writing of divorce and she could go get married again.

But it didn't define what uncleanness is. And Hillel was the one who said uncleanness can be almost anything. Almost anything the guy doesn't like about his wife.

But Shammai said it had to be something as grievous as fornication or sexual infidelity. Now, we'll find in a moment when we look at what Jesus said that He agreed with Shammai on this matter and not with Hillel. But we'll get there in a moment.

We need to recognize that when God took Israel to be His people, He entered into a covenant which everywhere in Scripture is likened to a marriage covenant. As a matter of fact, the Bible gives us reason to believe that when God made marriage between man and woman, He did so to be a picture of God's relationship with His people. This is true in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

In the New Testament, we're more familiar with it because we're familiar with the fact that the church is called the Bride of Christ in the New Testament. And that Paul says when he talks to husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church and the wives submit to their husbands as the church does to Christ. And he quotes the verse in Genesis for this caution, a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

And Paul says this is a great mystery but I speak of Christ and the church. Obviously, Paul tells us that the creation of marriage in the first place was done to depict the relationship of God and His people. In the New Covenant time, it's Christ and the church.

In the Old Testament, it was Israel and God. And when God brought them out of Egypt and brought them to Mount Sinai and gave them His law, He entered into a solemn covenant with them which forever afterward is in the Bible likened to a marriage. In Exodus chapter 20 when we see the giving of the Ten Commandments and all and the establishing of this covenant, God said in Exodus 20 and verse 5, You shall not bow down to idols nor serve them for I the Lord your God am a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me.

Now He's saying listen, you've entered into a covenant relationship with Me. You're My wife. If you go after other guys and in this relationship He's God, you go after other gods, then I'm going to get jealous and I'm going to come down hard on you because that is spiritual adultery.

And the prophets Ezekiel and Hosea and Jeremiah and Isaiah all spoke of Israel as having committed adultery against God. Now, the people of Israel actually did commit sexual adultery too, but when the prophets spoke of their adultery, they were talking about idolatry. They were saying the people of Israel had served other gods and had broken the marriage covenant that God had made with them.

If you look at Jeremiah, well, before you look there, look over at Exodus 34. Exodus 34 verses 15 and 16. God is warning the Israelites when they go into the Promised Land not to enter into any covenants with the inhabitants of the land.

He says, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they play the harlot... excuse me, and they meaning the Israelites, play the harlot... that means commit sexual immorality with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods. And one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice and you take of his daughters and your sons and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods. Now, they're not talking about actual sexual intercourse here with their gods.

The gods are just made of stone and wood. But what he's saying is the worshipping of these gods for an Israelite who is part of God's wife, God's covenant people, is like harlotry. If an Israelite worships a god other than the true God to which they are married, then they are committing something that as far as God is concerned is spiritual adultery.

In Jeremiah chapter 31 where we have the promise of the new covenant, God makes it very clear that at Mount Sinai He entered what He considered to be a marriage relationship with Israel. Jeremiah 31 beginning with verse 31. It says, Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt.

My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. Now He says, I made a covenant with them, I married them, I was a husband, but they didn't play the wife, they played the harlot. I was a good husband, I was faithful, but they broke the marriage vows.

Now when God entered into this covenant with Israel, He made it clear that if they would worship other gods, He would consider that to be adultery. It would be a breach of covenant. And that would be grounds for Him to go elsewhere, to look elsewhere for a people.

In Deuteronomy 31, in verse 16, Deuteronomy 31, 16, it says, The Lord said to Moses, Behold, you will rest with your fathers, and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them. And they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. The people break

covenant with God.

But look at Deuteronomy 32, next chapter, verse 21. He says, Deuteronomy 32, 21, They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God. That is, they worship gods that aren't really gods.

They have committed adultery. Just like God said He was a jealous God. If they worship idols, He'll be like a jealous husband.

He says, They have provoked Me to jealousy by basically worshipping what is not a real God. They have worshipped false gods. They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols.

Now notice this, But I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation. I will move them to anger by a foolish nation. What he means by this is simply this, I'm God.

You're My people. We're married. You go after other gods.

I'll go after another people. You break covenant with Me. You break our marriage vows.

You go and commit adultery. I'll find another wife. I'll find someone else.

And Jesus indicated that that's exactly what God, in fact, had done. We read a number of places in Scripture that God did divorce Israel because of her harlotry. We see it stated very plainly, for example, in Isaiah 50, in verse 1, Thus says the Lord, Where is the certificate of your mother's divorce whom I have put away? He's referring to the nation as their mother.

Where is the certificate of your mother's divorce whom I have divorced, He says. I have put away. God divorced Israel.

In Jeremiah 3, He says it again. God apparently believes in divorce under certain circumstances because He did it Himself. And He's the model.

He's always given us the model for us to follow as a marriage head of the home. In Jeremiah 3, 8, God said, Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away. That means divorced her.

And given her a certificate of divorce. Okay? So, God says, I divorced her. Because why? Well, she committed adultery.

That must be grounds for divorce, according to God. If you look over at Zechariah, nearly the last book in the Old Testament, chapter 11. I don't have time to go into this little bit here, this vision he has.

It's kind of this acted parable. But suffice it to say that the prophet Zechariah in this

passage plays the role of God in relation to Israel. And you can read the whole passage on your own.

It takes a long time to read it and to discuss it. But in verse 10, the prophet who's acting out a role where he represents God in relationship to Israel, he says, I took my staff, beauty, and cut it in two, that I might break the covenant which I had made with all the peoples. Now, God had made a covenant with the peoples, Israel and Judah.

And at this particular point, which in this particular acted parable represents the time when the Jews had rejected Christ, he says he broke His covenant with them. Now, God's not a covenant breaker. He just acknowledged that the covenant was broken by them.

You see, when God made the law and made the covenant with Israel, they were married. When they worshipped the golden calf a few days later, that was adultery. He already had an adulterous wife within a few days of the time they got married.

They did it again and again and again for hundreds of years. The prophets came and complained about it. The people kept doing it, worshipping idols.

God put up with an adulterous wife for hundreds of years. And all the while, he was in the position either to give her a little longer and forgive this time again, or divorce her. He could divorce her at any time.

When they made the golden calf, he threatened to do it. He said, I'm going to wipe them all out. I'm going to make a new nation out of Moses.

He's the only faithful guy here. He was going to divorce Israel right then. And Moses made intercession.

He said, don't do it. Please, keep them. Keep the promises to them.

And so, God spared them. But finally, when they killed Jesus, He divorced them. And you'll read of this in Matthew 21.

Verse 33 and following. Very instructive parable. I'd like you to pay close attention to what Jesus says here.

He said, hear another parable. There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now, when vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers that they might receive its fruit.

And the vinedressers took his servants and beat one, killed one, stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first and they did likewise to them. Then last of all, he sent his son to them saying, they will respect my son.

But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, this is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance. So, they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Therefore, when the owner of that vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers? And his audience answered. They said to him, he will destroy those wicked men miserably and lease his vineyard out to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons. And Jesus said to them, have you never read in the Scriptures the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone? This was the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Therefore, I say to you, notice this, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. Now, there is an important transfer that took place here. You might remember that when God entered into covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, when He married her, in that very passage, actually in the 19th chapter of Exodus, verses 5 and 6, God said to Israel, if you will obey my voice indeed and keep my covenant, then you will be a peculiar treasure unto me above all nations for all the earth is mine, saith the Lord, and you shall be a kingdom unto me.

Of priests. Israel was going to be His kingdom insofar as she was in covenant with Him. Insofar as she kept the covenant and remained married to God, Israel would be His kingdom.

What does Jesus say to Israel? The kingdom of God is now taken from you and it is given to someone else. God didn't stay unmarried. He divorced and took another.

As He said He would in Deuteronomy and as we have seen historically that He has done. Now, in this parable, it's very important to note some people say, well, God hasn't really put away Israel permanently. Steve, haven't you read Romans 11? Yes, many times.

I understand it a little differently than I used to because I was told by teachers to see it a certain way but once I studied it on my own, I realized that it doesn't necessarily mean what I thought it meant. But, has God put away Israel permanently? Well, read what Jesus said. The vineyard is Israel.

The vineyard is the kingdom of God really. The vinedressers are the leader of Israel. Throughout history, God sent His messengers, the prophets to them saying, where is the fruit? The fruit was justice and righteousness according to Isaiah 5, 7. God looked to His vineyard for justice and righteousness.

He looked for good grapes but He got oppression and misbehavior from them. So, the prophets came saying, we need the fruit. God wants the fruit.

And they killed the prophets, cast them out of the vineyard. But notice where it says He sent His Son. But He doesn't just say He sent His Son next.

He says, last of all. He put up with them killing His prophets and ignoring Him and not producing fruit for 1,400 years. One after another, He sent messengers to give them another chance, another chance, another chance.

Then He says, last of all, their last chance, He sent His Son. How'd they do? They killed Him. And that was their last chance.

That's why Jesus says, okay, I'm serving you the divorce papers. The kingdom of God is taken from you. It's given to someone else.

Who's that? The church, really. The church. Those who keep His covenant.

So, does God believe in divorce and remarriage? You bet He does. Does He believe in being patient with an immoral wife? He demonstrated a great deal of patience. If a man wants to be like God in his marriage, he's got an adulterous wife, he ought to show a great deal of patience and give opportunities for repentance, possibly.

But if he chooses to divorce on the grounds of adultery, I believe he is doing nothing other than what God Himself chose to do. And God is the model of a covenant keeper in the Bible. We do no better than to model ourselves after Him.

And so, we should be as faithful to our covenants as God is to His, but we can't be holier than God. I think some people would like to be. You meet a person who divorced his wife because she committed adultery or she divorced her husband because he committed adultery.

You say, well, they're in sin. Well, you expect them to be holier than God? God divorced His wife because of adultery and took another. Now, what did Jesus say about this? We've been looking only at the Old Testament for the most part, although we just did read something from the New Testament.

But there's some real specific stuff, of course, that Jesus said about this. I'm going to have to wind this down for this weekend and I'm going to have to take it up to finish up next time. I've never been able to give this whole thing in one session before.

I've tried every time I've always wanted to, but I can't get into one session. I'd like you to be aware of all the Scriptures that speak directly to the issue of divorce. They're in your notes on the back side of the sheet.

Roman numeral 4, biblical passage about divorce. There's three categories of these. There's those that are found in the Old Testament and there's those that are recorded in Jesus' teaching in the Gospels.

And then there's those that are found in Paul's epistles, principally Romans and 1 Corinthians, but also a verse that is sometimes thought to be related in 1 Timothy where

it says an elder should be the husband of one wife. Now, these are the passages. These are all of the passages that come up for consideration when you look for the biblical teaching on divorce.

There's a fair number of them there. And we need to be able to take a look at them and see what God is trying to communicate on this subject in each of them because He really does, you know, He doesn't talk just to hear the sound of His own voice. He talks because there's something about His heart He wants us to know.

And so, we will not look at these all now, but when we come back to it next time, we're going to look at all these Scriptures and see what they have to say. Now, some might say, well, why even bother with the Old Testament ones? The Old Testament is passé and we live under the New Testament now. Well, that's to a very large degree true.

We don't offer animal sacrifices anymore like they did in the Old Testament. We don't make pilgrimages to Jerusalem. We don't necessarily have to eat a kosher diet as they did or circumcise our children or those kinds of things, keep the festivals.

But morality is the same now as it was then. Murder is wrong in the Old Testament. It's wrong in the New Testament.

Adultery is wrong in the Old Testament. It's equally wrong in the New Testament. That which is morally wrong in the Old Testament is morally wrong in the New.

And we will find that Jesus says, among other things, that He that divorces His wife except for the cause of fornication and marries another commits adultery. Now, adultery is a moral issue. And yet Jesus did not, in my opinion, change what the Old Testament said.

He amplified it. Now, let me tell you why I say that. This is something very important for us to think about.

People might say, well, yeah, in Deuteronomy 24, God did allow remarriage, but Jesus came and He gave us the new law. Well, did Jesus give us a new law or did He expound on the old law? Think about it. That passage where Jesus talks about divorce is in a series of teachings He gives.

He says, You have heard that it was said by them of old time. And He says what they had heard from the Old Testament. But I say unto you... And then He gives what He says.

Does He ever revoke what was said in the Old Testament? No. He says, You have heard that it was said you shall not commit murder. But I say, whoever is angry at his brother for another cause is just as guilty.

Now, Jesus didn't say, but I say go ahead and murder. Right? He didn't change what the

Old Testament said. He amplified it.

He said, You have heard that it was said by them of old time you shall not commit adultery. But I say unto you, whoever looks at a woman to lust after her commits adultery with her already in his heart. He doesn't say, but I say unto you, go ahead and commit adultery even though the Old Testament says not to because I'm changing the law.

He didn't change anything. He amplified it. Actually, what He did is simply explain what the rabbis had obscured.

Jesus didn't create a new law. He said, You know what the law has said, but your rabbis have not told you what it means. And I will tell you what it means.

I'll say this to you. And when He says, You have heard that it was said by them of old time he that divorces his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement. He's quoting Deuteronomy 24.

He says, But I say unto you, He's not changing the law. He's explaining it as in the other cases. At least I understand this to be the case.

We'll talk about this later, next time. But when He says, whoever divorces his wife except for the cause of fornication is doing something wrong, very wrong. Now, what's He just done? He's just interpreted Deuteronomy 24 authoritatively for us.

The rabbis argued about what is that uncleanness that Deuteronomy mentions that makes it okay to divorce your wife? Jesus answers the question. If you didn't do it for fornication, you didn't do it legitimately. In other words, when you look at Deuteronomy 24, that word uncleanness, stick in the word fornication.

And that's what Jesus has done. He's helped us to understand what the law said. And then we need to, of course, look very carefully at what Jesus said because Jesus, when He talked about divorce, spoke about it in very absolute terms.

And one of the things that confuses the issue is that Jesus talked about it twice in Matthew, once in Mark and once in Luke. In Matthew chapter 5 and also in chapter 19 when He talked about divorce, Jesus is quoted as saying, except for the cause of fornication. But in Mark and in Luke, that exception is not mentioned.

We just have Jesus saying in those places, whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery. No exception is mentioned. And this has led, of course, to a great deal of discussion.

Well, if you take it the way Mark and Luke have it, there are no exceptions. A man who is divorced and remarried is committing adultery. If you take it the way Matthew has it,

there is an exception.

Now, who is right? How do you deal with that? Well, there is no problem with it. We can see. I mean, we will have to talk about it because we don't want to handle it irresponsibly or too lightly.

But we will be able to demonstrate without any question, I think, without serious dispute, I think, what the way to handle those kinds of discrepancies is. I might give you a hint. In Luke, I believe it is, as Jesus said, a wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign.

However, no sign will be given to this generation. But Matthew says, in the same context, no sign will be given to this generation except the sign of the prophet Jonah. Well, what do we do now? In one Gospel, he said no sign is going to be given.

End of story. The other Gospel says no sign except this. One Gospel states the exception.

The other doesn't. Shall we decide the exception is not legitimate or shall we decide that the passage that did not state the exception is simply summarizing, stating a general principle, not stating every conceivable exception to it. Well, we will need to know how to study the Scriptures to know how to sort those things out.

But what is going to be very important to us is to see what Paul said, what Jesus said, what the meaning of fornication is, because there are a wide variety of opinions about what it means, fornication. Some people think that only refers to sexual impurity before the marriage. Others believe it means something like an incestuous marriage that was not legitimate in the first place.

There are all kinds of opinions, but it's not hard to get the right one from the Scripture. We can go to the lexicons and find out how the word was used generally by the biblical writers and so forth. It's amazing how many people are confused about it, but I think it's usually because they are trying to defend a position that can't be defended biblically, and so they have to ignore what the Greek words mean and give them special meanings to reach their own conclusions, I guess.

One thing I hope that we will have time to get into next time is the specific question of what do we do with cases where people come to the church and let us say they have already been divorced wrongly and remarried wrongly. There are cases like that. And they are now Christians, and they come to church.

What must be done? Now, some people say, well, let bygones be bygones. It's water under the bridge. Let's start from here and go on with our lives and just cover it with the grace of God.

Others say, wait a minute. You can't have these people living in an ongoing adulterous relationship and confessing the name of Christ in the church. Who's right? Who's right?

Well, the answer is, well, there is a case-by-case way of looking at these things.

It's not always one answer or the other. It's not always the case that we should just say, well, we should just live with this. And it's not always the case that we should say these people should be required to separate.

There are biblical principles I want to discuss that will apply to these decisions. Those decisions, I think, have to be made responsibly and biblically. What does fornication mean? If that's the one exception.

You can't divorce or remarry except if your divorce is on the grounds of fornication. Well, what is fornication? The only reason I bring this up, it should be a very easy answer. Except there are some Christians who have postulated theories.

One theory is that fornication does not refer to adultery within marriage, but only refers to premarital sex. That there is actually a different word in the Greek for adultery. Moikeia is the Greek word for adultery and porneia is the Greek word for fornication.

Jesus uses both of them in that passage when he says that he divorces his wife except for the cause of porneia causes his wife to commit moikeia, adultery. They say two different words, not the same thing. There is a difference between adultery and fornication, they say.

Therefore, it's wrong to say that adultery is grounds for divorce, but rather fornication is. What is that? They say that's actually a reference to the woman you marry who actually turns out not to be a virgin because she has committed premarital sex beforehand. In that case, if she represented herself to you as a virgin, you married her, and then you found out she wasn't a virgin and she had committed fornication before marriage, then you can divorce her on those grounds because it would be like you married her under misrepresented information and therefore you're free from your vow in the matter, but for no other reason.

That's what they say. Now, there's no reason to strictly limit the word porneia to premarital sex, but one reason they do so is they say, well, listen, if she had committed adultery, she'd be stoned to death, not divorced. So, he can't be talking about adultery here, but wait a minute.

In the Old Testament, if she committed premarital sex, she'd be stoned to death too in one case. Now, if a man and a woman who were not married slept together under the law and were caught, they'd have to get married. They wouldn't be stoned to death, but if a woman represented herself as a virgin and married a man and he found she wasn't a virgin, unless she or her parents could come up with what the Bible calls the tokens of virginity and prove that she really was a virgin as they represented her as being, she would be stoned to death because she played the harlot in the house of her father, it

says.

That is to say, premarital sex was not always punishable by death, but if somebody had been guilty of it and then went ahead and passed themselves off as a virgin to someone, their prospective husband, that treachery, that perjury, that lying under oath was something they could be put to death for and would be. So, we can't just say, well, Jesus wasn't talking about adultery, but premarital sex because adultery, she would have been stoned. Well, under the law, she would be stoned if it was premarital sex too in those cases.

The word fornication is much broader. Some very imaginative Christian writers have said that fornication simply refers to unlawful marriages like in Ezra where the Jews married women they weren't allowed to marry. They said that's what porneia means and in that case, of course, they were allowed to divorce, but only in such cases.

However, that doesn't agree with Scripture in general. We're not allowed to marry non-Christians, but if you've done so, Paul says don't divorce them. Only if they depart are you free.

You can't divorce them. So, that wouldn't agree with what Jesus is saying there. The word fornication in the Greek language in the time of the New Testament and before by several centuries and since.

It's used a lot in the Bible. It's used a lot outside the Bible. It's even used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament which was originally written in Hebrew, but it was translated almost three centuries before Christ into Greek.

The word porneia appears a lot of times. Let me simply say this. Porneia functioned in the Greek language as a general term for sexual immorality.

That's why the New King James translates it sexual immorality in the places we look at where the King James used fornication. All sexual immorality was porneia. Adultery is sexual immorality.

Therefore, it is porneia. Homosexuality is also sexual immorality. That also is porneia.

Bestiality, incest, and a lot of other sexual sins are all sexual immorality, and they are all therefore under the umbrella of porneia. You find that the word is used in the book of Jude in verse 7 talking about the sin of the sodomites. The people of Sodom were destroyed because of their fornication.

Porneia. Does anyone recall what their sin was? They were homosexuals. Jude refers to that as porneia.

Homosexuality is porneia. Paul describes a case in 1 Corinthians 5.1 of what he calls

porneia in the church, fornication, and he describes it. A man had his father's wife.

That is incest and adultery if his father was still living. But it's called porneia. Obviously, the word porneia extends to a great number of things, all of them sexual sins.

In the Old Testament, when God accused Israel of adultery or playing the harlot against Him, obviously a picture of marital unfaithfulness, adultery, the Greek Old Testament consistently uses the word porneia there, fornication. So, it's obvious that in the Greek language in biblical times, the word porneia did not just refer to premarital sex or just unlawful marriages or something like that. It referred to any kind of sexual immorality.

Anything the law forbade sexually, if it was committed, was porneia. So, in marriage, porneia is the only grounds for divorce that Jesus allows between couples married within the faith. And that would include adultery.

That would include homosexual acts. That would include incest. That would include whatever the Bible forbids sexually.

If it is committed by one party, that is porneia. And that would appear from what Jesus said to be grounds for divorce. And anyone who wants to be stricter than Jesus about this, and there are Christians who have tried to do so, are trying to be, I guess, holy above what is written.

You can't really get more spiritual than Jesus. You can try, but you can't get there. If you get more spiritual than Jesus, you become more like a Pharisee.

You become like Him. That was really the difference between Him and them. They taught as doctrines the traditions of men.

If you go beyond what Jesus taught, what is it you're teaching? It's not what Jesus teaches. It's the tradition of man. And that is what the Pharisees did.

I bear no malice to people who think differently than I do on this subject, or even to those who would say that my wife and I are living in adultery because I've been divorced. And there are people, there's Christians in this community that believe that. I truly bear them no malice.

I feel sorry for them, and for me a little bit, because I don't get to fellowship with them. They're good folks. But I realize that Christians differ on a lot of issues.

Divorce and remarriage is one of them. But if we search all the relevant Scriptures, we've looked at all of them tonight that are in the Bible on it, it seems to me that we can't get away from the simplest, and really what has become the view that I'm sharing here is sometimes referred to as the evangelical consensus. There are people who are critical of the evangelical consensus on this.

But it is largely what evangelicals have taught since the days of the Reformation, and I think for good reason. I think because the Bible teaches it.