

DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE: REAFFIRMING THE DIVINE IDEAL
Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-12; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 & Other Selected Scriptures
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INTRODUCTION

1. We return this morning to our study of the Gospel of Matthew. Our specific text is just two brief verses, but those verses introduce us to a subject that is contemporary, controversial and crucial for us to understand.

Since we've been out of Matthew for quite some time, I'd like to back up just a bit and get a little running start at this passage.

2. Within the flow of the context of Matt. 5, this passage is one of a series of authoritative pronouncements by our Lord that illustrate the fact that He did not come to do away with the Law.
 - a. Matt. 5:17-18 – *Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*
 - b. His hearers were used to hearing about the law—they were enslaved to it because of the Judaistic legal system they were under—but they knew little about loving God and obeying Him from the heart.

The Rabbis and other Jewish religious leaders had built a legalistic religious system that majored on external compliance to the Mosaic Law as they interpreted and applied it, to the neglect of true internal righteousness that poured forth from a heart of love toward God and a desire to glorify Him.

- c. Their legalism was so blinding that even when their own Messiah came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ, manifesting the power, love, truth and righteousness of deity, they rejected Him outright and sought His death because He didn't conform to their teachings.
 - d. Jesus rebuked them repeatedly, yet they would not repent. In John 5 He told them that it was not He who would accuse them before the Father, but Moses, in whom they had put their hope. Because they didn't even believe Moses, therefore how could they believe Christ? They stood condemned by their own legalism.
 - e. But after saying that He did not come to do away with the Law, Jesus then said something utterly shocking to his hearers:

Matt. 5:20 – For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

That was shocking because Jesus was saying that even the scribes and Pharisees were not going to make it into the kingdom of heaven!

“If that’s the case,” his hearers must have thought, “how can *I* possibly make it?” That’s like telling a Catholic, “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pope, Cardinals, Bishops and Priests, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

- f. Religious legalism cannot save! Those who worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth, not by works of legalism designed to earn one’s way into God’s favor.

The primary issue in salvation is internal transformation, not mere external conformity to man-made laws. That’s a message even many professing Christians today don’t understand.

- g. And Jesus drives that point home with a series of examples:

5:21-22 – *You have heard that the ancients were told, “You shall not commit murder” (external act) and “Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.” But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court (internal attitude) . . .*

5:27-28 – *You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery”; (external) but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (internal)*

5:33-34 – *Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, “You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.” But I say to you, make no oath at all . . .*

5:38-40 – *You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.*

5:43-45 – *You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

- 3. In today’s passage Jesus makes another authoritative pronouncement that, together with Matt. 19:3-9, reaffirms the divine ideal for marriage and once again shifts the emphasis from external legalistic conformity to a man-made law, to the internal heart of the matter.

Matt. 5:31-32 – *It was said, “Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce”; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

- 4. We will be returning to this topic when we reach Matt. 19, but we can’t deal with Matt. 5:31-32 now without also considering Matt. 19.

Matt. 19:3-9 – *Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?”*

And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?” He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

5. Those two passages, together with other related OT and NT passages, raise many questions and have given birth to several conflicting views of divorce and remarriage.

Even the title of this series: “Divorce & Remarriage: Reaffirming the Divine Ideal” seems somewhat contradictory, since the divine ideal, as we will see, didn’t include either divorce or remarriage.

But AFFIRMING THE DIVINE IDEAL IS THE APPROACH JESUS TOOK in Matt. 19, so that’s the approach we will take as well.

6. I’ve outlined the study as follows to help you track with the key passages:

- I. THE IDEAL OF CREATION – Gen. 1:27, 2:24
- II. THE NECESSARY CONCESSION – Deut. 24:1-4
- III. THE CALCULATED CONFRONTATIONS – Matt. 5 & 19
- IV. THE LORD’S CORRECTION – Matt. 5 & 19
- V. THE APOSTLE PAUL’S COUNSEL – 1 Cor. 7:10-16
- V. THE SUMMARY PRINCIPLES

7. This morning I will share some introductory thoughts and then, from the genesis record, erect the backdrop of God’s ideal, against which we will be able to see more clearly the fuller picture of this crucial subject in the weeks ahead.

That’s precisely what our Lord did with the Jewish antagonists in Matt. 19. He took them back—not to the Rabbinic teachings or even to the law of Moses—but to creation itself.

8. The importance of this study:

- a. If you are young, you may think that marriage and divorce is a topic for adults, not young people. But, believe it or not, every adult was young once. And what you learn in your youth shapes the way you live as you grow older.
- b. If you are single, you may initially think that a study of divorce doesn’t relate to you. But it most certainly does!

- Because now, in your singleness, is when you learn the attitudes and principles that will be foundational to a godly marriage.
 - Now is the time when you cultivate relationships that will eventually influence your choice of mates.
 - If marriage is God’s plan for your life, now is the time when you become the person God wants you to be so that you attract the godly mate He has planned for you.
 - But even if singleness is the Lord’s will for your life, you will be surrounded throughout life by married people who need to understand God’s priorities and principles for their lives.
- c. Perhaps you have been through a divorce, or you may be the child of divorced parents (I am).
- If so, this topic may be the last thing you want to hear about.
 - The pain is still too fresh.
 - The memories still haunt you.
 - You know that the damage can never be fully repaired, although by God’s grace and mercy enormous good can come out of your pain.
 - But you, too, need to know the Lord’s perspective on this issue, and that divorce is not the unforgivable sin, and that it is possible to move forward with full assurance of His blessing.
- d. If you are happily married, you may initially think that a study of divorce doesn’t relate to you.
- Perhaps, like me, you prefer not to even think about it. But this study does relate to you!
 - It reaffirms the sanctity of your union, and the priority of life-long commitment to your partner for the well-being of your souls and the Glory of your God.
 - It can teach you to hate sin even more than you do now, as you see the all out attack upon the sanctity of marriage that the current divorce rate in America represents (about 50%).
 - And it can help you understand the gravity of what we’re dealing with. The family is the primary building block of society. Destroy the family and you eventually destroy a society.

“Virtually every major social pathology has been linked to fatherlessness: violent crime, drug and alcohol abuse, truancy, teen pregnancy, suicide—all correlate more strongly to fatherlessness than to any other single factor. The majority of prisoners, juvenile detention inmates, high school dropouts, pregnant teenagers, adolescent murderers, and rapists all come from fatherless homes. The connection is so strong that controlling for fatherlessness erases the relationships between race and crime and between low income and crime....” The Politics of Fatherhood, Stephen Baskerville, Ph.D., Howard University; peer-reviewed article in PS: Political Science and Politics, vol. 35, no. 4 (December 2002).

- e. Truly, the importance and relevance of this topic transcends marriage and impacts virtually every area of family and society.

So, where do we begin to approach a topic of this importance and magnitude? I think it's best to begin by acknowledging that it presents:

9. A multifaceted challenge

a. It is a sensitive issue

- 1) I've heard many Christians lament that their divorce was without doubt the most emotionally painful experience of their lives. Often those emotions remain raw for many years, and some of the ramifications remain for a lifetime.
- 2) I know from personal experience, being a child of divorced parents, the life-long implications of divorce on children.
- 3) This is a delicate subject that must not be reduced to a mere clinical analysis of its sinful nature, but which also must be understood in light of God's truth:
 - because therein is the instruction and warnings for those who are considering marriage
 - and therein is the source of forgiveness and healing for those faithful partners who have been victimized by divorce
 - and therein is the admonition and correction for those who would seek divorce outside of the Lord's will.

b. There is an Old Testament information gap

- 1) Due to an inadequate OT background
 - a) Knowledge of the practice of divorce among the ancient Hebrews is quite sketchy.
 - b) The primary references to divorce in the law (Deut 22:18-29; 24:1-4) are "case laws" that refer to particular situations.
 - c) Deuteronomy 24:1 mentions a bill of divorcement to be secured in a specific situation, but it gives no explanation or history the bill of divorcement. It simply acknowledges its existence.
 - d) No general law on divorce is given in the OT.
 - e) I hasten to add, however, that the OT does give God's ideal for marriage and emphatically declares that God hates divorce.

Malachi 2:13-15 – *“This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand.*

Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring?

*Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. **For I hate divorce,**” says the Lord, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the Lord of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”*

- f) I do want to point out—not to minimize divorce—but to keep it in its proper perspective, God’s hatred for divorce does not make divorce unique among sins:

Prov. 6:16-19 – There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers.

Proverbs 8:13 – The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate.

- g) God hates sin in any form. But divorce is especially devastating because it strikes a blow at the very heart of His design for human relationships, society, and the future and well being of mankind.
- h) Despite God’s hatred for divorce, the OT also acknowledges the fact that sometimes marriages were broken, and that civil legislation was needed (i.e., a “bill of divorcement”) to protect women and to help restrain divorce and the proliferation of adultery in a sinful society.

- 2) NT teaching on divorce is largely built on OT background, so the challenge of “rightly dividing the word of truth” in this study extends to the NT as well.

c. It Requires Comprehensive & Extensive Study

d. There Are Numerous Views

That’s not surprising, given man’s natural bent toward disagreement. But in this case, the difficulty of the study makes disagreements inevitable.

There are four main views among professing Christians relative to divorce and remarriage:

- 1) Divorce and Remarriage are never permitted
 - Believes that they are not possible because of the “one flesh” union.
 - Covenant relationship forever or until one partner dies.

- 2) Divorce is permissible in some cases, but no remarriage is permitted until after the death of the former spouse

- 3) Divorce and remarriage are permitted in a wide variety of circumstances

Held by a wide variety of people – many liberals. Has different shades of meaning and application:

 - Divorce is always sin, yet God forgives. Only the couple has the authority to decide whether or not to divorce.
 - Divorce is permitted in cases of emotional, physical, or verbal abuse.
 - Pragmatic Churches: Don’t want to tell people something that they don’t want to hear!

- 4) Divorce and remarriage are permitted in very limited circumstances
 - Affirms that divorce in the Scriptures is permitted only because of man’s sin. It is a grievous concession to man’s sin and is not part of God’s original plan for marriage.
 - Unrepentant sexual sins (Matt. 19:9)
 - Unbeliever refuses to live with Christian spouse (1 Cor. 7:15)

- 5) View #4 is the view that we affirm at Community Church.

I. THE IDEAL OF CREATION – Gen. 1:27; 2:24; Eph. 5:18-33

A Marriage Made In Heaven? We often speak of “marriages made in heaven.” But more often we see marriages that seem to have been made in quite the opposite location. However, the fact is: marriage itself was designed by God, and therefore quite literally was made in heaven.

A. As God Designed It

1. The institution of marriage was intended to be:
 - Sanctified, not sinful
 - Loving, not leaving
 - Sacrificial, not self-serving
 - Complimentary, not competitive
 - Supportive, not oppressive

- Fulfilling, not fractured
2. It should be characterized by:
 - Joy, not jealousy
 - Contentment, not confusion
 - Devotion, not destruction
 3. William Barclay Comments:

Marriage should not narrow life; it should complete it. For both partners it must bring a new fullness, a new satisfaction, a new contentment into life. It is the union of two personalities in which the two complete each other. That does not mean that adjustments, and even sacrifices, have not to be made; but it does mean that the final relationship is fuller, more joyous, more satisfying than any life in singleness could be.

The true basis of marriage is not complicated and hard to understand: it is simply the love that thinks more of the happiness of others than it thinks of its own, the love which is proud to serve, which is able to understand, and therefore always able to forgive. That is to say, it is the Christlike love, which knows that in forgetting self it will find self, and that in losing itself it will complete itself.

B. As Pictured in Adam & Eve

The ideal of marriage is pictured in the pre-fall union of Adam and Eve.

1. Gen. 1:27 and 2:24
 - 1:27** *God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*
 - 2:20** *The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.*
 - 2:21** *So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place.*
 - 2:22** *The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.*
 - 2:23** *The man said,*
“This is now bone of my bones,
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man.”
 - 2:24** *For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*

2. God created Adam as a man, with full intent of creating a mate to compliment and complete him, and for him to compliment and complete her. And that's precisely what he did, forging a union so intimate & complete that the two become one in God's sight.
3. Jesus reiterated that plan and purpose in Matt. 19:4-6

“Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”
4. The Jews understood God's ideal—in principle, if not in practice. In fact, the Jewish term for marriage was kiddushin, which meant sanctification or consecration.
 - a. It was used to describe something that was dedicated to God as his exclusive and peculiar possession. Anything totally surrendered to God was kiddushin.
 - b. This meant that in marriage, one partner became the exclusive possession of the other, as much as an offering became the exclusive possession of God.

C. As Pictured in the Church

1. Ephesians 5:18-33

*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but **be filled with the Spirit**, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; **always giving thanks** for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and **be subject to one another** in the fear of Christ.*

***Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.** For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.*

***Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her**, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body.*

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

2. Col. 3:18-19

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.

D. By Way of Contrast

Lay that pattern of marriage against the pattern we see modeled in our society and in our media and you quickly see how all-pervasive and relentless the enemy's attack is on marriage and the family is.

We are being preconditioned to marital disaster. That's why last week I encouraged the young people to listen attentively to this series even though they may be years away from marriage.

1. Divorce is robbery

In society's eyes "divorce is a legal term for the act of removing the obligations of a marriage contract" (*Zondervan Pic. Encyclopedia*), but in God's eyes it is akin to robbery.

Marriage is a covenant (solemn agreement) of Companionship in which both parties promise to provide companionship (in all its ramifications) for one another. It is also a civil contract between the two parties.

Therefore, divorce:

- Robs the individual partners of what rightfully belongs to them alone.
- Robs them of the completeness and fulfillment God intended it to provide.
- Robs children of the parental presence, stability and security they were intended to have.
- Robs society of the family stability it needs to survive.
- Most importantly, it robs God of glory.

2. Divorce is amputation

- a. Describing divorce as robbery is a general analogy that Scripture does not specifically use. However, Scripture uses far more graphic language.
- b. The OT word "divorce" in the phrase "Bill of Divorcement" (Deut. 24; Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8) means "to cut off" and is related to the word for hewing down trees, even cutting off heads.

- c. The most prominent NT word, *apoluo*, means “to loose from, to put from, put away, send, release, or dismiss.” It indicates a broken relationship; the severing of what was once a living union.
 - d. Divorce, then, is a kind of amputation. And it cannot occur without damage to all parties involved. *Evan. Dic. of Theology*
3. Divorce is a symptom (of hardened hearts)

Illustration: While considering the ideal of creation, I was reminded of a story I read some years ago about a very wealthy gentleman who was hiring a new chauffeur. Many men applied, and after his staff conducted extensive background checks and other procedural matters, they brought the top three to him for a personal interview.

Over the course of the interview session, he said to the first applicant, “Tell me about your driving skills.” The applicant replied, “Well, sir, let me put it this way: if I were driving you on a mountain road and there was a steep cliff to our side, I could drive within one foot of that cliff without losing control and jeopardizing your safety.” The gentleman replied, “Very impressive.”

He said to the second applicant, “Tell me about your driving skills.” Not to be outdone by applicant number one, the second applicant said, “Well sir, with all due respect to my fellow applicant, I could drive you safely within six inches of that cliff without ever slowing the automobile.” The gentleman replied, “Very impressive indeed.”

Then he said to the third applicant, “And tell me about your driving skills.” The applicant replied, “Quite frankly sir, I would keep you as far away from that cliff as possible.” The gentleman replied, “You’re hired!”

What’s the point? The Jewish leaders were always defining how close one could get to breaking the law without violating it (i.e., How close can I get to sin without actually violating the law? How far can I go without actually sinning? How many options do I have for divorcing my wife before I am guilty of adultery?). Jesus was saying, in effect, “stay as far away from it as possible.”

II. THE NECESSARY CONCESSION – Deut. 24:1-4

A. The New Testament Question

After hearing Jesus reiterate the divine ideal in Matt. 19:4-6, the Pharisees asked Jesus in verse 7,

“*Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?*”

The Rabbis had wrongly taught that Moses had commanded that men divorce their wives under certain circumstances.

B. The Old Testament Context

1. The Pharisees were referring to Deut. 24:1-4 (Case law)

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 indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance.

2. Things to note from this passage:

- a. This seems at first reading to be an odd situation.
- b. Moses gives no explanation of what a Certificate of Divorce was.

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 indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house...

- d. By implication, Moses permitted and tolerated an existing custom. He acknowledged its existence and regulated it. But he never commanded it.

Jesus confirmed that in Matt. 19:8 – [Jesus] said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.”

C. The Primary Cause (for Moses' Concession)

1. Why would Moses permit something that God hated?
2. Matt. 19:8 - [Jesus] said to them, “*Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.*”
3. “Hardness of Heart”

Hardness of heart refers in general to sinful disregard of God, which results in sinful disregard of His Law, which in turn results in lawless attitudes and actions.

D. The Stated Conditions

The concession of Moses was based on two conditions:

Deut. 24:1 - *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 indecency in her. . .*

1. First condition: some indecency is found
 - a. “Some Indecency” Defined:
 - 1) Translated as: “*Some unseemly thing*” (ASV); “*some indecency*” (NASV); “*something indecent*” (NIV).
 - 2) “*Offensiveness, shameful; disgrace*” (Analytical Hebrew & Chaldee Lexicon, Davidson, 789).
 - 3) Some “*immodest or indecent behavior*” (Dictionary of the Bible, Hastings, III:275).
 - b. Much discussion has focused on whether Deut. 24:1-4 refers to divorce because of adultery or for some lesser reason of incompatibility.
 - c. However, since the law called for adultery to be punished by death (Deut. 22:22), the latter is likely (probably some serious sexual misconduct short of adultery).
 - d. Of course, many Hebrew men in actual practice used divorce as a merciful response to an unfaithful wife (Joseph/Mary – Matt 1:19) (*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia*).
 - e. Conclusion: Some indecency = some shameful indecency (immorality) short of adultery.
 - f. The Rabbinical Teachings
 - 1) In the post-OT writings of the rabbis, two primary schools of thought emerged concerning all matters of Jewish law, including the grounds for divorce.
 - 2) The strictly conservative school of **Rabbi Shammai** restricted divorce to cases of adultery, thereby nullifying the death penalty of Deut. 22:22 and Lev. 20:10.

“Let a wife be as mischievous as the wife of Ahab,” they said, “she cannot be divorced except for adultery.” To the school of Shammai there was no possible ground of divorce except only adultery and unchastity (William Barclay, Matt. 5).
 - 3) The Liberal school of **Rabbi Hillel**, Shammai’s contemporary, held that ‘some indecency’ might include more or less anything

which her husband found offensive (e.g., a man could divorce his wife if she spoiled his dinner by putting too much salt in his food, if she went in public with her head uncovered, if she talked with men in the streets, if she spoke disrespectfully of his parents in his presence, if she was a brawling woman whose voice could be heard in the next house, if she was troublesome or quarrelsome. William Barclay, Matt 5). Such teachings nullified the restraints of Deut. 24.

- 4) Additionally, a certain **Rabbi Akiba** said that the phrase “if she find no favour in his sight” meant that a man might divorce his wife if he found a woman whom he considered to be more attractive than she (William Barclay – Matt. 5).
- 5) By the time of Christ, Rabbinical teachings had made divorce compulsory for two reasons:
 - a) For adultery (the Jews were not implementing the death for adultery law of Deut. 22, and they did not have the prerogative of capital punishment under Roman occupation).
 - b) For sterility. The object of marriage was the procreation of children; and if after ten years a couple were still childless divorce was compulsory. In this case the woman might remarry, but the same regulation governed the second marriage (William Barclay – Matt. 19).
- 6) Those erroneous teachings set the stage for the confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees that were to come in Matt. 5 & 19.

2. Second condition: a Bill of Divorcement must be given

Deut. 24:1 – *And he writes her a **certificate of divorce** and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house . . .*

- a. There is no explanation in Scripture of what it was, how it was acquired, or for what specific purpose it was intended.
- b. Extra-biblical sources (sources other than Scripture) that give us some insight:
 - 1) The putting away (divorce) of a wife with a letter of divorce . . . is assumed as a custom founded upon tradition, which was probably adopted by the Israelites in Egypt (K & D).
 - 2) Historian Flavious Josephus writes, “He that desires to be divorced from his wife for any cause whatsoever (and many such

causes happen among men) let him, in writing, give assurance that he will never use her as his wife any more: for by this means she may be at liberty to marry another husband.”

- 3) Some historians record that it was a legal document that identified her uncleanness.

E. The Implied Constraints

Even though Moses made a concession to a sinful practice by establishing “contingency legislation”, the conditions he placed upon it were designed to help restrict and regulate the practice.

1. God “determined to restrain their reckless practices, to regulate their stubbornness, and to soften the abuses suffered by women.” (Ron Halbrook, Guardian of Truth, 1/4/90).
2. The act of divorcement was to be certified on a written document, the preparation of which, with legal formality, would afford time for reflection and repentance. (Jamieson, Robert; Fausset, A.R.; and Brown)
3. Unless the woman was a notorious sinner, her dowry was to be returned to her family. Barclay – Matt. 19
4. The first four verses of that chapter may be summed up as follows: “Husband, you better think twice before you reject your wife. Remember that once you have put her away and she has become the wife of another you cannot afterward take her back; not even if that other husband should also have rejected her or should have died” (William Hendriksen – Matt. 5).

F. Summary Conclusions & Principles:

1. Scripture teaches, and Jesus affirmed, the Divine Ideal for marriage:
 - One man + One women = One Flesh (for life!)
 - As pictured in Adam & Eve and in Christ-centered marriages that picture Christ’s love and sacrifice for His church.
2. Scripture also acknowledges that some marriages will fail due to the hardness of sinful hearts.
3. With regard to civil legislation, Moses permitted divorce for less than adultery, to regulate and minimize the practice.
4. However, Jesus made no such concession to man’s hardened hearts. He taught that divorce for anything less than adultery resulted in the proliferation of adultery (Matt. 5 & 19).

5. Jesus set the standard as the divine ideal unless that ideal is irreparably damaged through unrepentant ongoing sexual sin.
6. Paul adds (in 1 Cor. 7:15), if an unbelieving spouse chooses to leave the marriage because he or she cannot tolerate the presence of holiness in the home.
7. But even when a marriage covenant is adulterated, Scripture does not instruct or mandate that divorce take place.
8. In fact, the book of Hosea illustrates God's proactive and relentless forgiveness toward his spiritually adulterous children, which illustrates his power to produce forgiveness and reconciliation even in marriages that have been grossly and repeatedly adulterated by hardened, sinful hearts.

III. THE CALCULATED CONFRONTATIONS – Matt 5:31-32; 19:3-9

A. Jesus Confronts the Jews

Matt. 5:31-32 – *It was said*, (Note that Jesus did not say, “It is written” or “Thus saith the Lord”, but “It was said” – ref. to Rabbinic teachings, not to Scripture) “*Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce*”; *but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

B. The Jews Confront Jesus

Matt. 19:3-9 – *Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing him and asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?”*

And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?” He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

IV. THE LORD'S CORRECTION – Matt 5:31-32; 19:3-9

A. The Lord's Correction in Matthew 5

1. *It was said, “Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce.”*

(cf. erroneous rabbinical teachings above for background to this statement.)

2. *“But I say to you”*
 - a. This is divine authority speaking.
 - b. The One who created all things for His own glory and revealed all divine truth is about to correct the misrepresentation of that truth.
3. *“That everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery.”*

- a. This is commonly called “an exception clause” and is often understood as meaning that Jesus is giving His approval of divorce in cases where the covenant of marriage has been adulterated.
- b. However, the literal meaning of that phrase in the Greek is: “apart from the issue of unchastity.”

What Jesus is saying is: “Everyone who divorces his wife, apart from the issue of unchastity, makes her commit adultery.”

- c. Jesus is *not* saying, “If your wife (spouse) commits unchastity, you have my permission to divorce her.”
- d. He *is* saying (or at least implying), “If divorce occurs because of unchastity, you do not cause your former wife to commit adultery.
- e. His primary focus is to clarify what constitutes adultery, not what constitutes grounds for divorce.
- f. Therefore, if there is an exception here, it is this: All divorce results in adultery except divorce brought about by unchastity.
- g. What does “unchastity” mean?

- 1) It does not mean physical abuse, emotional abuse, psychological abuse or drug abuse. As serious as those sins are, they do not specifically factor into our Lord’s teaching on divorce, and therefore should not be considered grounds for divorce in and of themselves.

- 1) The Greek word is “*porneia*”, from which we get our English *pornography* or *pornographic*.

- 2) Its precise meaning in this context is much debated. That is due, in part, to the fact that “*porneia* and its cognates were used not only of fornication, but of practically every specific sexual act, as

well as of all sexual sins taken collectively” (cf. R.H. Charles, The New Testament on Divorce, p. 103).

- 3) However, I believe that in this context, as well as in Matt. 19, it refers specifically to the adultery.

Some reasons:

- There is significant lexical support for that conclusion (e.g., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 500; *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, p. 693; *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised*, 1978 Edition, P. 337; *The New Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon*, p. 532).
- The O.T. background of Matthew 5 & 19 is clearly Deuteronomy 24:1-4. And the main point of Deut. 24:1-4 is: whoever divorces his wife for a cause less than adultery (i.e., because of “some indecency”) causes the defilement of the wife when she remarries.”
- Jesus would be consistent to reaffirm the same principle here: whoever divorces his wife for a cause less than *porneia* (adultery) causes the adulteration of the wife when she remarries.”
- Jesus is addressing *porneia* within the context of marriage. It would seem, therefore, that the sexual unfaithfulness of a marriage partner would constitute adultery, especially in Jesus’ day.

h. Literal rendering

“Everyone who divorces his wife, apart from the issue of adultery, makes her commit adultery.”

4. “*Makes her commit adultery*”

- a. How does being divorced for less than adultery make the wife commit adultery?
- b. That seems to say that the act of divorce itself makes her an adulterer. In other words, divorce = adultery.
- c. However, the language in the Greek is in the passive voice, which indicates, not what the woman does, but what she undergoes, suffers or is exposed to. Commentator William Hendriksen suggests the

rendering: “Whoever divorces his wife [apart from the issue of adultery] exposes her to adultery.”

- d. Hendriksen adds: What Jesus is saying, then, is this: Whoever divorces his wife except on the ground of infidelity must bear the chief responsibility if as a result she, in her deserted state, should immediately yield to the temptation of becoming married to someone else.
- e. That rendering appeals to me based on the language and context. However, the primary point, by implication, is that adultery occurs when the former spouse remarries. And that’s the primary issue Moses and Jesus were addressing.
- f. So we could amplify the verse to say: “Everyone who divorces his wife, apart from the issue of adultery, makes her commit adultery when she remarries.”

And then Jesus adds:

- 5. *“And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”*

Again, the compelling implication is that whoever marries a woman who has been divorced apart from the issue of adultery commits adultery.

- 6. Literal amplified reading:

Matt. 5:31-32 – It was said, “Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce”; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, apart from the issue of adultery, makes her commit adultery when she remarries. And whoever marries a woman who has been divorced apart from the issue of adultery commits adultery also.

B. The Lord’s Correction in Matthew 19

- 1. The Pharisee’s first trick question – v. 3

v. 3 - Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” (a la the School of Hillel)

- a. We have already seen the background to this question.
- b. They were trying to trap Jesus in his words, likely thinking that no matter what He answered, he will fall into disfavor with some group (i.e., followers of Shammai or Hillel, or better yet, Herod Antipas, who had John the Baptist put to death for confronting his adulterous marriage to his sister-in-law). Maybe Jesus would suffer the same fate.

- 2. Jesus’ first scathing rebuke - vv. 4-6

vv. 4-6 – *And He answered and said, “Have you not read (i.e., John 3 – Jesus with Nicodemus – “You are the teacher of Israel and you do not know these things?”) that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”*

- a. Jesus appealed to the Divine Ideal of Creation
- b. He appealed, not to the Rabbi’s, but to God Himself!
- c. This is not fundamentally a matter of law; it is a matter of divine principle.
- d. The one-flesh union was established before the law.

3. The Pharisee’s second trick question – v. 7

v. 7 – *They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?”*

Implication: The Pharisees were saying, in effect, “Ah Ha! We knew it. You’re not only at odds with the Rabbis; you’re also at odds with MOSES himself! Try to explain your way out of this one!

4. Jesus’ second scathing rebuke - v. 8

v. 8 – *He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses (as a civil lawgiver) permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.*

- a. Because of their sinful hearts toward God, His Law, and His divine plan for marriage, Moses initiated civil legislation in an attempt to regulate divorce with its proliferation of adultery.
- b. But that was not God’s original intent for marriage, and it is not to continue.

From the beginning until now, God’s ideal & intention for marriage has never changed (“*it has not been this way*” – Present perfect tense -- Something in the past continuing through to the present time of speaking).

The concession Moses made was temporary and purely civil in character.

- c. Jesus put a stop to the concession of Moses!

5. Jesus' authoritative correction – v. 9

v. 9 - *And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality (porneia), and marries another woman commits adultery.*

- a. Here we have another “exception clause” that is really no exception clause at all.
- b. The literal rendering is: “Whoever divorces his wife not on the grounds of adultery, and marries another woman commits adultery.”
- c. As in Matt. 5:32, Jesus is not defining the grounds for divorce. He is clarifying what constitutes adultery.
- d. As in Matt. 5:32, if there is an exception clause here, it is this: “all divorce results in adultery except divorce that is brought about by *porneia* (adultery).” Same principle as in Deut. 24 and Matt. 5.

6. The fuller picture

- a. Combining Matt. 5 & 19 we have the fuller picture: *If a man divorces his wife apart from the issue of adultery, or not on the basis of adultery, he causes her to commit adultery when she remarries; and he causes her new husband to commit adultery; and he himself commits adultery when he remarries. And we also add that he causes his new wife to commit adultery as well.*
- b. That's why I say that Moses and Jesus were primarily addressing the issue of the proliferation of adultery through divorce.

7. The practical implications

1. The question remains: If Matt. 5 & 19 do not contain “exception clauses”, and if Jesus does not give explicit permission or sanction for divorce, what happens when there is adultery in a marriage? Is it permissible to divorce?
2. In other words, if someone comes to me as a pastor and says, “My spouse has committed adultery. Is it OK with God if I get a divorce?” My response must be: “Divorce is never OK with God. God hates divorce!”
3. He or she may respond: “Well then, let me put it this way: even though God hates divorce, will He permit me to divorce my spouse under these circumstances?”
4. My response must indicate that: the specific biblical principle is that if you divorce not on the grounds of adultery, you will commit adultery if

you remarry. And your former spouse will commit adultery if he or she remarries. And your respective new spouses will also commit adultery.

5. Implication: If you divorce on the grounds of adultery, you will not commit adultery if you remarry.
6. He or she may respond: “But that doesn’t directly answer my question. I need to know if I have God’s permission to divorce on the basis of adultery.”
7. But the answer I have given is the answer Scripture gives. That’s one of the things that makes counseling in potential divorce situations so challenging. We must not go beyond Scripture, but we must also weigh the implications of the direct statements of Scripture.
8. I hasten to add: We know that God is gracious toward the adulterous spouse by not requiring his or her death. In the Old Testament economy that spouse would have been put to death, so the question of divorce and remarriage would have been moot. It seems consistent, therefore, that God, while showing extreme mercy to the unfaithful spouse, would not at the same time bind the faithful spouse to the relationship. But that, too, is a conclusion drawn from implication, not from a direct teaching.

C. Summary Conclusions & Principles:

1. God is so opposed to divorce, that Jesus nowhere gives an explicit sanction to it.
2. However, the Bible does recognize that divorce will take place because of sin.
3. But even if there is adultery in a marriage, that is not a signal to get an immediate divorce.
4. Reconciliation and prayerful consideration of God’s counsel in the areas of grace and forgiveness must first be sought.
5. Naturally, if an adulterous affair persisted in a marriage, then the inevitable result would probably be divorce.
6. If that were the case, on the basis of implication, the best we can say is that a faithful spouse who divorces (or is divorced by) his mate because of adultery will not become an adulterer in remarriage.
7. When such a case does occur, those who remarry (aside from a faithful spouse) commit adultery, which is precisely what Moses and Jesus were trying to prevent.
8. I should add that in a case where the husband and wife are professing believers, and one adulterates the marriage, Matthew 18 discipline, not divorce, should be the first option.

If ultimately divorce were to occur, the faithful Christian spouse would need to have confidence before the Lord that he or she had exhausted every biblical option to bring about repentance and restoration.

Introduction to 1 Corinthians 7:10-16

1. The October 25 issue of *Christianity Today* contained an article on the women's ministries of The Episcopal Church in the USA. One of the liturgies mentioned in the article is a "Liturgy for Divorce", which reads, in part:

While the couple have promised in good faith to love until parted by death, in some marriages the love between a wife and a husband comes to an end sooner. Love dies, and when that happens we recognize that the bonds of marriage, based on love, also may be ended. God calls us to right relationships based on love, compassion, mutuality, and justice. Whenever any of these elements is absent from a marital relationship, then that partnership no longer reflects the intentionality of God.

2. Such an unbiblical and abominable view of love and marriage would be understandable coming from the world, with its all out assault on marriage and family values.

But when it comes from a religious denomination claiming to represent Christ's voice in the world, it staggers the senses and is indicative of the hard heartedness Jesus spoke of in Matt. 5 & 19 when he confronted the religious leaders of His day on their own sinful views of marriage and divorce.

3. Of course divorce and its related proliferation of adultery are glorified in our culture beyond anything imaginable when our Lord walked the earth. But he addressed the issue as it existed then, and then the Apostle Paul weighed in on the issue in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16.

4. The Context

- a. Throughout this chapter Paul is calling for sexual purity and the prevention of fornication (cf. v. 2 "Because of the immoralities").
- b. He gives several scenarios, and in verses 10-16 he addresses how the gospel is to impact marriages in a highly pagan and adulterous society.
- c. For example:

1 Cor. 6:18-20 – *Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.*

2 Cor. 6:14-18 – *Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?*

Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

"Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.

- e. In light of such teachings, the Corinthian's newly found faith raised a number of important questions.
- 1) How did God feel about marriages that were formed in a pagan society?
 - 2) Should Christians divorce for the sake of moral purity?
 - 3) What is a Christian to do who was married to an unbeliever?
 - a) That was an especially critical question in light of the fundamental and pervasive differences in their natures: light vs. darkness, righteousness vs. unrighteousness, Christ-centered vs. world-centered.
 - b) And what of the children? Wouldn't they, in effect, be the product of union between Christ and Satan?
 - c) We can readily imagine what heart-burning this question must have evoked in the early church. What is to be done in such a case? The early converts must have asked. Will not the believer be contaminated and compromised by such an anomalous relationship? How can a believer be one flesh with an unbeliever? And what about the offspring? Will not the children contract defilement from the unbelieving partner? Such questions would inevitably have harassed the minds and consciences of sensitive but uninstructed believers. It is to such a perplexed state of mind that Paul directs his apostolic teaching (John Murray, *Divorce*, p 63).
- f. And so, we have Paul's responses . . .

V. THE APOSTLE PAUL'S COUNSEL – 1 Cor. 7:10-16

1 Cor. 7:10-16 – But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. For the

unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

A. To Spouses in Christian Marriages – vv. 10-11

1. Paul reiterates the Lord's counsel – v. 10a

But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord.

- a. Paul is exercising dual authority: apostolic authority and divine authority.
- b. This indicates that Paul is addressing Christians.
 - 1) He never give authoritative instructions to unbelievers.
 - 2) In verses 12-16 he addresses marriages wherein only one spouse is a Christian, but in these verses, both are Christians.

2. The Lord's directives

- a. Directive One: Remain Married – v. 10b, 11c

The wife should not leave her husband . . . and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

- 1) A Christian Spouse should not leave another Christian spouse – v. 10b
- 2) Why would these believers want to divorce?

Likely due to lack of understanding of the sanctity of marriage, and perhaps assuming that marriage was somehow immoral in God's eyes.

Christians today find many reasons to divorce: “Irreconcilable differences”, lack of fulfillment, finding someone more desirable, perhaps even for spiritual reasons (e.g., “God is directing me to leave”, “We are theologically incompatible”, “My spouse is so spiritually immature. It's pulling me down. Surely God doesn't want me to stagnate spiritually.”). All such reasons violate the direct commands of Scripture.

- b. Directive Two: Remain Single – v. 11a

But if she does leave, she must remain unmarried,

- 1) This does not imply that the Lord or Paul approve of the “leaving.”
 - 2) Given the sinfulness of the human heart, even the Christian heart, if a Christian spouse should leave his or her Christian spouse, that spouse is to remain single or....
- c. Directive Three: Reconcile – v. 11b
- Or else be reconciled to her husband.*
- 1) This is not a suggestion or creative option. It is a divine directive from Jesus Himself.
 - 2) The Christian spouse who files for divorce against a Christian spouse must pursue reconciliation.

B. To Spouses in Mixed Marriages (Unequally Yoked) – vv. 12-16

1. Paul’s authoritative counsel – v. 12a

But to the rest I say, not the Lord . . .

- a. Not a denial of inspiration. Some more liberal-thinking commentators like to view the contrast between verse 10 and verse 12 as a denial on Paul’s part of inspiration. In other words, when Jesus speaks, it is inspired. When Paul speaks, it is simply his own opinion on the matter.
- b. However, the point here is: Jesus had not addressed this specific situation. There was no prior revelation on this issue. Therefore Paul addresses it by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Paul’s instruction is God’s revelation on the matter.

2. The directive: Remain Married – vv. 12b-13

If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.

- a. “Brother” = Christian man
- b. “Woman” in this context = Christian woman
- c. Divorce is prohibited if the unbelieving spouse consents to remain in the marriage.

3. The rational: sanctification – v. 14

a. Sanctification the unbelieving spouse – v. 14a

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband;

- 1) The Greek word for “sanctify” is used in various ways throughout Scripture (e.g. of things set apart for sacred service, of people set apart for sacred service, of purifying someone from evil).
- 2) Here it refers to someone (spouse or child) who becomes holy (set apart) by association, not by salvation.

“Sanctified” and “holy” in this context refer, not to salvation (otherwise the other spouse would not be referred to as an unbeliever), but to the “setting apart” of the unbelieving spouse and the children in the sight of God. They receive special blessings due to the presence of the believing spouse.

The sanctification is matrimonial and familial, not personal or spiritual. In God’s eyes a home is set apart for Himself when the husband, wife, or, by implication, any other family member, is a Christian. Such a home is not Christian in the full sense, but it is immeasurably superior to one that is totally unbelieving. Even if the Christian is ridiculed and persecuted, unbelievers in the family are blessed because of that believer. One Christian in the home graces the entire home (John Mac Arthur, *The Macarthur New Testament Commentary, 1 Corinthians*, p. 166).

b. Sanctification of the children – v. 14b

For otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

- 1) “*For otherwise*” – Could mean, if both parents were unbelievers, the children would be unclean. Or, more likely, if it were not true that the believing spouse sanctifies the unbelieving spouse (i.e., if the unbeliever defiled the believer), the children would be unclean (i.e., defiled).
- 2) The believing spouse needn’t be concerned about becoming defiled by the unbelieving spouse, or of the children being defiled. In fact, just the opposite is true. A believer in the family sanctifies the entire family.
- 3) That does not mean that all family members become Christians, although the impact of a faithful Christian spouse (or child) on a family is significant.

- 4) It means that the Lord's blessing is upon that family by virtue of the presence of that believer. The blessings of God upon a Christian family member will spill over to all members of that family.
- 5) God's truth is infused into that family. The gospel of grace is on display within that family, giving unsaved family members a first-hand look at salvation and the transforming power of God's mercy.
- 6) We see the principle of overflowing blessings on a national level: Daniel in Babylon, Joseph in Egypt
- 7) Whether you are a spouse or a child, never underestimate the power of your presence within your family. You are Christ's ambassador to those whom you love most.
- 8) Most people come to Christ because of the witness and example of family or friends. That's the primary means by which the gospel is spread. That's why our primary evangelism strategy at Community Church is to help equip you to live the truth and speak the truth in love where you live, work, study and socialize.

However, there are times when the unbelieving spouse simply cannot tolerate the presence of righteousness in the home and must literally flee its presence. In that case, Paul gives an exception:

4. The exception: abandonment (desertion) – v. 15

Yet if the unbelieving one leaves [i.e., abandons the relationship], let him leave.

- a. What Paul is not saying:

- 1) Please understand that the issue here is not the refusal of an unbelieving spouse to tolerate the persistent nagging a Christian spouse.
- 2) Wives, it's not your husband's refusal to tolerate those Bible verses taped to his beer cans, or the incessant playing of Christian radio and television during his days off.

Peter gives instruction to win him without a word through your godly character (1 Pet. 3:1).
- 3) This is not a believer refusing to live with an unbeliever or fleeing the presence of darkness in the home.
- 4) It is not even a Christian spouse divorcing an unbelieving spouse. The one leaving is the unbeliever, not the believer.

- b. What Paul is saying:
- 1) “*Let him leave*” has the weight of a command, not mere permission.
 - a) This is a child of darkness refusing to live in the presence of light. It is the domestic equivalent of John 3:19-20

And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.
 - b) It is a slave of sin fleeing from freedom in Christ.
 - c) It is one who is spiritually blind fleeing from the constant reminder of the One who can give him sight.
 - d) It is one who is lost refusing to be found.
 - e) It is the unbeliever taking full responsibility for the divorce in the sight of God.
 - 2) *The brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases.*
 - a) The Christian is not bound to the relationship.
 - b) The Christian is not required to compel the departing spouse to stay. In fact, he is instructed not to.
 - c) “In God’s sight the bond between a husband and wife is dissolved only by death (Rom. 7:2), adultery (Matt. 19:9, and an unbeliever’s leaving.” (MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, p. 167).
 - 3) *But God has called us to peace.*

A believing spouse need not strive to maintain a relationship that is in a continual state of conflict due to an unsaved spouse who is openly antagonistic toward the gospel and toward his believing spouse.

5. The ultimate goal: salvation – v. 16

For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

- a. There is a general principle reflected in this statement: God often uses believing spouses as instruments through whom He brings unbelieving spouses to salvation.
- b. The general application of that principle in this passage is for believing spouses to do everything in their power to remain in their marriages so God can use them in that way.
- c. The more specific application of that principle in this verse seems to be: If, however, an unbelieving spouse insists on leaving the marriage, the believing spouse should let him or her go, and not be concerned about how God will effect that spouses salvation.
- d. In other words, evangelism is not cause for attempting to maintain a marriage if the unbelieving spouse insists on leaving.

V. THE SUMMARY PRINCIPLES

A. General Introductory Principles

1. This study is important for young people because what they learn in their youth shapes the way they live as adults.
2. This study is important for single people because now is when they learn the attitudes and principles that will be foundational to a godly marriage. Now is when they cultivate relationships that will eventually influence their choice of mates. And now is when they become the people God wants them to be so they attract the godly mate He has planned for them should marriage be His plan for their lives.
3. This study is important for happily married couples because it reaffirms the sanctity of their union, and the priority of making a life-long commitment to their partners for the well-being of their souls and the Glory of their God.
4. This study is important for divorced people because they need to know the Lord's perspective on this issue, that divorce is not the unforgivable sin, and that it is possible to move forward with full assurance of God's blessing.
5. The family is the primary building block of society. If the enemy can destroy families, he will eventually destroy the society.
6. God hates divorce – Malachi 2:13-15
7. God hates sin in any form (Prov. 6:16-19; 8:13), but divorce is especially grievous because it strikes a blow at the heart of God's design for human relationships, for society, and the future and well being of mankind.
8. There are four main views among professing evangelical Christians relative to divorce and remarriage:
 - Divorce and Remarriage are never permitted

- Divorce is permissible in some cases, but no remarriage is permitted until after the death of the former spouse
 - Divorce and remarriage are permitted in a wide variety of circumstances
 - Divorce and remarriage are permitted in very limited circumstances
9. The Old Testament teaches, and Jesus affirmed, the Divine Ideal for marriage (i.e., one man + one woman = one flesh for life! As pictured in the pre-fall union of Adam & Eve [Gen. 1:27; 2:24; Matt. 19:4-6], and in Christ-centered marriages that picture Christ's love and sacrifice for His church [Eph. 5:18-33; Col. 3:18-19]). That is a fundamental principle of creation and life; not simply a law.
 10. Marriage is a covenant (solemn agreement) of companionship in which both parties promise to provide companionship (in all its ramifications) for one another. It is also a civil contract between two parties.
 11. Not every marriage is "made in heaven", but marriage itself was designed by God, and therefore was quite literally made in heaven.
 12. Marriage as God designed it was intended to be sanctified, not sinful; loving, not leaving; sacrificial, not self-serving; complimentary, not competitive; supportive, not oppressive; and fulfilling, not fractured. It should be characterized by joy, not jealousy; contentment, not confusion; and devotion, not destruction.
 13. The enemy of our souls is waging an all-pervasive and relentless attack on marriage and the family.
 14. Divorce is robbery. It robs the individual partners of what rightfully belongs to them alone; robs them of the completeness and fulfillment God intended it to provide; robs children of the parental presence, stability and security they were intended to have; robs society of the family stability it needs to survive; and, most importantly, robs God of glory.
 15. By definition, divorce is also amputation. The Old Testament word for divorce ("Bill of Divorcement" – Deut. 24; Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8) literally means "to cut off" and is related to the word for hewing down trees, even cutting off heads. The most prominent New Testament word, *apoluo*, means "to loose from, to put from, put away, send, release, or dismiss." It indicates a broken relationship; the severing of what was once a living union.

B. Key Principles from Deuteronomy 24:1-4

1. There is no general law on divorce in the Old Testament.
2. The primary references to divorce in the law (Deut 22:18-29; 24:1-4) are "case laws" referring to particular situations.
3. Despite God's hatred for divorce, the Old Testament acknowledges that sometimes marriages will be broken, and that civil legislation was needed to protect women and to help restrain divorce and the proliferation of adultery in a sinful society (i.e., the "bill of divorcement").
4. Moses acknowledged the existence of divorce and regulated it, but never commanded it.

5. The concession Moses made for divorce was temporary and purely civil in character.
6. “Some indecency” in Deut. 24:1 likely refers to some shameful indecency (immorality) short of adultery (Deut. 22:22 called for adultery to be punished by death.).
7. Divorce for any reason other than adultery results in “defilement” of the wife upon remarriage.

C. Key Principles from Matthew 5:31-32 & 19:3-9

1. Some Rabbinical schools of Jesus’ day taught that a man could divorce his wife for virtually any reason.
2. Affirming the divine ideal of creation is the approach Jesus took in Matt. 5 & 19. By doing so, He took his hearers back—not to the Rabbinic teachings or even to the law of Moses—but to creation itself.
3. Scripture acknowledges that some marriages will fail due to the hardness of sinful hearts.
4. “Hardness of heart” refers in general to sinful disregard of God, which results in sinful disregard of His Law, which in turn results in lawless attitudes and actions.
5. With regard to civil legislation, Moses permitted divorce for less than adultery, to regulate and minimize the practice. However, Jesus made no such concession to man’s hardened hearts. He taught that divorce for anything less than adultery resulted in the proliferation of adultery.
6. Jesus set the standard as the divine ideal unless that ideal is irreparably damaged through ongoing unrepentant sexual sin.
7. Divorce for any reason less than adultery results in adulteration of the wife and her new spouse upon remarriage, and the adulteration of the former husband and his new wife upon his remarriage.
8. The “exception clause” of Matt. 5:32 (“Everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery” – NASB) literally reads “Everyone who divorces his wife, apart from the issue of unchastity, makes her commit adultery.”
9. The “exception clauses” of Matt. 5:24 & Matt. 19:3-9 are commonly understood to mean that Jesus disapproves of divorce except when the marriage is adulterated. However, Jesus never specifically gives permission to divorce. His primary focus is on what constitutes adultery when divorce has occurred, not what constitutes grounds for divorce. Therefore, any principles regarding grounds for divorce we draw from His teachings are by implication.
10. If any exception is intended in Matt. 5:32 & 19:3-9, it is this: All divorce results in adultery except divorce that is brought about by unchastity.
11. By implication, Jesus taught that if divorce occurs because of unchastity on the part of a wife, her former husband is not responsible for her adultery if she remarries (and vice versa).

12. “Unchastity” (Matt. 5:32 – NASB) and “immorality” (Matt. 19:9 – NASB), translate the same Greek word *pornea* (from which we get our English “pornography” or “pornographic”), and refer to adultery in these contexts.
13. *Pornea* does not refer to physical abuse, emotional abuse, psychological abuse or drug abuse. As painful and threatening as those sins may be to a marriage, they do not specifically factor into our Lord’s teaching on divorce and remarriage.
14. A literal amplified reading of Matt. 5:31-32: It was said, “Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce”; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, apart from the issue of adultery, makes her commit adultery when she remarries. And whoever marries a woman who has been divorced apart from the issue of adultery commits adultery also.
15. The literal rendering of Matt. 19:9: “Whoever divorces his wife not on the grounds of adultery, and marries another woman commits adultery.”
16. The combined literal reading of Matt. 5:32 & 19:9: If a man divorces his wife apart from the issue of adultery, or not on the basis of adultery, he causes her to commit adultery when she remarries; and he causes her new husband to commit adultery; and he himself commits adultery when he remarries. And, by implication, he causes his new wife to commit adultery as well.

D. Summary Principles from Matthew 5:31-32 & 19:3-9

1. God is so opposed to divorce that Jesus nowhere gives an explicit sanction to it.
2. However, the Bible does recognize that divorce will take place because of sin (hardness of heart).
3. By implication, if a person divorces on the grounds of adultery, he or she will not commit adultery if he or she remarries.
4. Even if there is adultery in a marriage, that is not a signal to get an immediate divorce. Scripture does not instruct or mandate that divorce must take place in such a situation.
5. The book of Hosea illustrates God’s proactive and relentless forgiveness toward His spiritually adulterous children, which illustrates His power to produce forgiveness and reconciliation even in marriages that have been grossly and repeatedly adulterated by hardened, sinful hearts.
6. Reconciliation and prayerful consideration of God’s counsel in the areas of grace and forgiveness must first be sought before pursuing divorce.
7. Naturally, if an adulterous affair persisted in a marriage, then the inevitable result would probably be divorce. If that were to occur, on the basis of implication from Christ’s teaching, the best we can say is that a faithful spouse who divorces (or is divorced by) his mate because of adultery will not become an adulterer in remarriage.
8. When such a case does occur, those who remarry (aside from a faithful spouse) commit adultery.

9. In a case where the husband and wife are professing believers, and one adulterates the marriage, Matthew 18 discipline, not divorce, should be the first option. If ultimately divorce were to occur, the faithful Christian spouse would need to have confidence before the Lord that he or she had exhausted every biblical option to bring about repentance and restoration.

E. Key Principles from 1 Corinthians 7:10-16

1. A Christian spouse should never divorce another Christian spouse (Paul does not give instruction regarding adultery in the marriage).
2. If a Christian spouse should divorce another Christian spouse, he or she is to remain single and pursue reconciliation.
3. A Christian spouse must not divorce an unbelieving spouse if that spouse consents to remain in the marriage.
4. The presence of a believing spouse in a marriage sanctifies the entire family (by association, not salvation). Therefore, all members of that family become the beneficiaries of special blessings that otherwise would not be theirs.
5. A believing spouse is not defiled by an unbelieving spouse, nor are their children defiled by the unbelieving parent.
6. God often uses believers as instruments of salvation for their unbelieving spouses. Therefore, Christians must do everything in their power to remain in their marriages so God can minister through them.
7. If, however, an unbelieving spouse insists on leaving the marriage, the believing spouse should let him or her go, and leave the departing spouses salvation entirely in the Lord's hands. In other words, evangelism is not cause for attempting to maintain a marriage if the unbelieving spouse insists on leaving.
8. If an unbelieving spouse leaves, the Christian spouse is no longer bound to the relationship.
9. The bond between a husband and wife is dissolved only by death (Rom. 7:2), adultery (Matt. 19:9), and an unbeliever's leaving (1 Cor. 7:12-16).
10. A Christian should never underestimate the power of his or her presence within the family. They are Christ's special ambassadors in that situation.
11. Most people come to Christ as a result of the witness and example of family or friends.
12. Our primary evangelism strategy at Community Church is to help equip members of our flock to live and speak the truth in love in every area of their lives.