

Jesus on Divorce

Text: Matthew 5:31-32

Introduction: One of my great frustrations as a dad is my kids using things in ways that they were not intended. This usually results in things getting broken.

In fact, just recently, after years of abuse, the handle for the footrest on my living room recliner finally bit the dust. You can no longer raise the footrest with the handle. You have to grab the footrest from the bottom or the side and raise it that way. The handle is still there, but it doesn't do anything. It just dangles there as a reminder to me that dads can't have nice things.

We talk a lot at Goshen about the brokenness of the world around us. We know that God is our Creator. He is the Creator of all that is. And the Bible tells us very clearly that He made everything very good. There was no imperfection in Eden. Everything was just as God designed it to be.

But in just the third chapter of the Bible, Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, sinned. They rebelled against God. God said not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And what did they do? They took. And they ate. They did the very thing that God told them not to do.

And what resulted? Sin. Death. Brokenness. Because of sin, things are not as they are supposed to be. They are not as God created them to be.

And this is nowhere more evident than in marriage. One of my favorite marriage books is Dave Harvey's *When Sinners Say "I Do."* Harvey reminds his readers of the reality that every time a man and a woman come together in marriage, it is the union of one sinner to another. And what do sinners do? We sin. We sin against one another even. And what results from sin? Brokenness. Understanding this reality is key to building a healthy marriage where repentance is practiced and forgiveness is freely given.

This morning we're talking about marriage and divorce. Because the Bible talks about marriage and divorce. We're making our way through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. And now we've come to a couple of verses in the middle of chapter 5 that deal with the topic of divorce.

Aren't you thankful that Jesus doesn't shy away from the hard topics of life. Divorce is a reality in a fallen, broken world. There are few, if any, people in this room who have not been touched by divorce in some way. Some of you have been divorced. Some of you have had parents or grandparents who have divorced. I expect all of us have friends or other family members who have divorced.

Maybe you're going through a tough time in your marriage right now. Maybe the thought of divorce has even crossed your mind. Maybe it's more than a thought. You're done. You've determined that the pain of divorce can't be greater than the pain of remaining in your current situation.

Whoever you are and whatever your thoughts about divorce, I want us to hear from Jesus this morning. After all, Jesus is Lord. It matters more what He says about divorce than anyone else in the world.

Go ahead and turn in your Bible to Matthew 5. We're going to be focusing our attention on verses 31-32. But I do want to back up a little bit and remind us where we've been. This section of the Sermon on the Mount started with Jesus declaring that He did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them. Then Jesus addressed anger and murder. Then lust and adultery. And now divorce.

So, let's read Matthew 5:17-32. It's on page 760 in the black pew Bible in front of you. If you don't own a Bible, we invite you to take the pew Bible with you when you leave.

(Read Matthew 5:17-32...Pray)

The seventh commandment says, "You shall not commit adultery." Last week we saw that Jesus applied the seventh commandment to lust in the heart. This morning we're going to see that Jesus also applied it to marriage and divorce.

I want to show you this morning that **followers of Jesus obey the seventh commandment by honoring marriage and despising divorce.**

Don't check out on me yet. That's the main idea for the sermon. I'm going to explain it as we go along. **Followers of Jesus obey the seventh commandment by honoring marriage and despising divorce.**

Let's see first that...

I. Followers of Jesus honor marriage (Matthew 5:31).

Jesus says... (Read vs. 31)

A. You'll notice something different here when compared to Jesus' teaching on anger and lust.

- 1. In verse 21 of Matthew 5, when teaching on anger and murder, Jesus quoted the sixth commandment. And in verse 27, when teaching on lust, Jesus quoted the seventh commandment.**
- 2. But here, in His teaching on marriage and divorce, Jesus doesn't quote one of the Ten Commandments. Instead, He summarizes Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which says, "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance."**

- 3. Chuck Quarles points out that the ambiguity of the phrase "some indecency" led to a significant debate over the correct interpretation among the rabbis (Quarles, 125).**
- 4. In fact, the school of Hillel held a very permissive interpretation of the phrase. They understood "some indecency" to refer to anything that displeased the husband.**
- 5. The school of Shammai, however, interpreted "some indecency" as a reference to sexual sin.**
- 6. The Mishnah, which is a collection of Jewish oral laws, gave a number of reasons for which a man could divorce his wife. If she was barren. If she was deaf or mute. If she had any of various physical ailments. Or even if she failed to perform certain services in the home (Quarles, 125).**
- 7. Rabbinic law held that a man could divorce his wife if her head was shaped funny. If she had poor posture. If her hair was thinning. If you've seen the top of my head on the sermon livestream, you know I'm glad that Ashley can't divorce me for thinning hair.**
- 8. A husband could divorce his wife if she had no eyebrows, or only one eyebrow, or bushy eyebrows. If her eyes were too low. If they were too high. If she was cross-eyed or had big eyes or little eyes. If her nose was too big or too little. If her ears were too little or too floppy. Or if she was missing some teeth. I'll resist the urge to make a West Virginia joke.**
- 9. A man could divorce his wife if she ate something he had forbidden her to eat. If she visited the home of her parents. Or if, against her husband's wishes, the in-laws moved into the same city to be near their daughter. Maybe some of you can understand that one (Quarles, 126).**
- 10. The point is that many Jews in the first century believed that couples could divorce for any reason. And really, it was the husband who could divorce his wife for any reason not the wife who could divorce her husband for any reason (Quarles, 127).**

11. This view of divorce for practically any reason is implied in the question that the Pharisees asked of Jesus in Matthew 19:3, “Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for ANY cause?”
12. When you read Deuteronomy 24:1 in light of this very permissive view of divorce, where a husband could divorce his wife for practically any reason, you see that God’s Law actually was intended to prevent a husband from casually breaking the marriage covenant with his wife.
13. And this is an important point for us to remember as we read Jesus’ words here in Matthew 5. We come to Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount with 21st century eyes and ears. We read this with our own cultural presuppositions regarding marriage and divorce. And there’s a temptation for us to read the words of Jesus as if they are oppressive or overbearing. But I want to challenge us to read the words of Jesus as good for us. We need these words if we’re going to enjoy healthy marriages that lead to the flourishing of our spouses, our kids, and even ourselves.

B. And all of that starts with God’s design for marriage.

1. God designed marriage in the beginning as the one-flesh union of one man and one woman.
 - a. We read a little bit about this in our Scripture reading this morning. In Genesis 2, God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). So, God determined to make a helper for Adam. God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam. And God took a rib from Adam’s side and made the woman. When God brought her to Adam, Adam said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen. 2:23).

- b. And there in the Garden of Eden, God performed what was essentially the first marriage ceremony. The Bible says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).
- c. See, God is the Creator of marriage, which means that He gets to define the terms. You and I do not get to say what marriage is and what it is not. The state does not get to say what marriage is and what it is not. Only God defines true marriage.
- d. In November, you’re going to have the opportunity to go to the polls to vote on what the Virginia Constitution says about marriage. And you should vote. I certainly plan to do so. And I encourage you to vote in alignment with what the Bible says about marriage. That it is the one flesh union between one man and one woman. But guess what? Regardless of how that vote goes, it won’t change a single thing about what marriage is. Because guess what? The Virginia Constitution did not create marriage. And therefore, it is not the final authority on what marriage is. God created marriage. He is the final authority on what marriage is.
- e. Marriage is the one-flesh union of one man and one woman.

2. The Bible also teaches us that marriage is monogamous.

- a. Not only is marriage a union between a man and a woman, it is a union between ONE man and ONE woman.
- b. This reality, rooted in creation, is at the heart of Jesus’ teaching here in Matthew 5.
- c. God took ONE man, Adam, and ONE woman, Eve, and He joined them together in marriage.
- d. This is why homosexuality, and fornication, and adultery, and divorce are serious matters to God. They are an affront to God’s good design in creation.

- e. **Marriage is a monogamous, heterosexual union between one man and one woman.**
- 3. The Bible also teaches that marriage is permanent.**
- a. **What I mean is that marriage is lifelong.**
 - b. **The man leaves his father and mother and holds fast to his wife. The two become one flesh. Which means that their union is for life.**
 - c. **The traditional wedding vows bear this out: “I, Adam, take thee, Ashley, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part.”**
 - d. **And what does the preacher say during the pronouncement? “Having consented together in holy wedlock, and having confessed the same before these witnesses.”**
 - e. **What is it they are confessing? Their faithfulness. Their commitment to one another until death do they part.**
 - f. **Marriage is permanent. It is lifelong. That’s how God designed it in creation. And followers of Jesus embrace this design.**

Followers of Jesus honor marriage. And #2...

II. Followers of Jesus despise divorce (Matthew 5:32).

Jesus says... (Read vs. 32)

When I say that followers of Jesus despise divorce, I’m using the word “despise” in two senses. Which I’ll explain in a moment. But what I don’t mean is that followers of Jesus despise people who are divorced. We despise divorce, but we love those who are divorced.

- A. I do want to be clear though that followers of Jesus should hate divorce.**

- 1. That’s the first sense in which I am using the word “despise” here. I mean that followers of Jesus hate divorce.**
- 2. For we know that God hates divorce.**
 - a. **Now, the language that “God hates divorce” is not the language that Jesus uses here in the Sermon on the Mount.**
 - b. **But it is biblical language. There is some difficulty with the translation of Malachi 2:16, but the gist of what is written there is that God hates divorce.**
 - c. **The language that Jesus uses in Mark 10:9 is equally strong: “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”**
 - d. **In fact, here in the Sermon on the Mount, in verse 32 of Matthew 5, Jesus makes clear that the marriage bond is so permanent that to treat it flippantly is to commit adultery.**
 - e. **Now, maybe you hear that “God hates divorce” and you think it’s too strong. God hates divorce? What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate?**
- 3. We live in a culture with a very warped view of both marriage and divorce. And we are conditioned by the culture to treat both marriage and divorce far too flippantly. So, it may strike you as harsh to hear that God hates divorce.**
- 4. But let me ask you. Don’t YOU hate divorce?**
 - a. **I think that if you don’t hate divorce, you’ve never been divorced, or had parents who divorced, or walked closely with someone through a divorce.**
 - b. **The only way not to hate divorce is to somehow live your entire life emotionally detached from anyone who has experienced a divorce.**
 - c. **People don’t get divorced because everything is going great.**

- d. No, when people get divorced, there has often been some kind of grievous sin committed by one or both parties that has led to that point.
 - e. Or, there has been countless smaller pressures and difficulties that have led to a place where there's so much anger and resentment that one or both parties can't possibly see a way forward.
 - f. And then once the divorce happens, that doesn't fix everything. The pain and resentment are still there.
 - g. And on top of that, what was ONE has now been ripped apart and become TWO.
 - h. The possessions have to be divided up. Custody agreements have to be established for the children. Alimony and child support payments have to be made. Children are scarred and often pulled between one parent and the other. Holidays will never be the same again.
 - i. Goshen, do you see why God hates divorce? We should hate it too.
 - j. Not because we hate people who have been divorced. No, exactly the opposite.
 - k. We hate divorce because we hate the pain and suffering that comes with tearing apart what God has joined together.
5. Jesus' teaching is clear. It's unequivocal. Jesus doesn't mince words, does He?
- a. Again, Jesus says here in the Sermon on the Mount... (Read vs. 32)
 - b. His argument is that when two people come together in a one-flesh union, you can't just tear that apart by going down to the courthouse.
 - c. Something happens when two people covenant together in marriage before God and other witnesses and then come to together to consummate that marriage. It can't just be undone on a whim.

- d. In fact, Jesus says that when a man divorces his wife and marries another woman, he commits adultery. And when a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.
- e. I'm sure you see how countercultural this is. Even within the church.

B. Which brings us to the other sense in which I say that followers of Jesus despise divorce. And it's that followers of Jesus reject divorce.

1. If you are not yet married, recognize that marriage is a serious commitment. It's a covenant. It's not something you enter into lightly. You don't enter into marriage with the idea that if it doesn't work out, you can just get divorced. No, you enter into marriage recognizing and committing together that this is for life.
2. And if you are married, reject divorce. Take it off the table. Remove it as an option. Don't allow your mind to go there. Realize that you have been joined together with your spouse in a one-flesh union that is lifelong. Till death do you part.
3. That doesn't mean that you have to just endure whatever comes your way in marriage. If you and your spouse are experiencing difficulties in your marriage, maybe you need good, biblical marriage counseling. The permanence of marriage doesn't mean that we accept the status quo in our marriages. It means that as followers of Jesus, we commit together to address our marriage problems so that we can once again flourish together.

C. Now, I spoke at the beginning of the sermon about the fact that we live in a broken world. And the truth is that divorce is a reality in a broken world.

1. That naturally raises the question of whether there are any circumstances in which divorce and remarriage are permissible according to the Bible. I believe there are two.

2. **One is found right here in Matthew 5:32 where Jesus says, “But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, EXCEPT ON THE GROUNDS OF SEXUAL IMMORALITY, makes her commit adultery.”**
 - a. **We see the same thing in Matthew 19:9.**
 - b. **“Sexual immorality” is a good translation of the Greek word “porneia” that is used here. It’s a broad term that can be used to refer to many forms of sexual immorality.**
 - c. **But because of the context of Jesus’ statement, we know that His intent is not to give broad license to divorce at the first hint of sexual immorality.**
 - d. **Rather, He is acknowledging that there is the possibility of a sexual immorality that is so deep, so serious, that the marital covenant has effectively been damaged beyond repair.**
 - e. **And in those situations, Jesus allows for divorce.**
3. **The second allowance for divorce is found in 1 Corinthians 7:15 where Paul writes, “If the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.”**
 - a. **In the preceding verses, Paul instructed believers who are married to an unbeliever to remain married in hope that the unbeliever will one day come to faith in Christ.**
 - b. **But here he says that if the unbelieving spouse deserts the believing spouse, then the believing spouse is free to divorce, and I believe remarry.**
 - c. **And while the Bible does not contain a specific allowance in cases of abuse, I believe that abuse falls under this allowance in 1 Corinthians 7. An abusive spouse is not a believing spouse. And by his or her abuse, the abusive spouse is effectively deserting the believing spouse.**

Conclusion: We’ve seen this morning that followers of Jesus obey the seventh commandment by honoring marriage and despising divorce.

It starts with the fact that marriage was created by God in the very beginning. It was created for our good and our enjoyment. But it was also created as an illustration of the gospel. As was read for us this morning in our Scripture reading, Paul writes in Ephesians 5:31-32, “‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

The Bible teaches that the church is the bride of Christ. Jesus is the bridegroom. And I want you to know, Goshen, that Jesus is always faithful to His bride. We do not have to wonder if He might divorce us. He will not. He will not take another bride. He will not grow tired of us. There will be no irreconcilable differences.

No, His love for His bride, the church, is a faithful love. And this marriage will one day culminate in what the Bible calls the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

See, in the new heavens and the new earth, there will be no more divorce. There will be no more marriage difficulties. In fact, the only marriage that will exist is a perfect marriage. The marriage of Jesus and His bride, the church. And our God will wipe away every tear from your eyes. There will be no more mourning nor crying. The pain of this world and broken relationships will be no more. The former things will pass away.

And how can you be invited to this supper meal? How can you experience the healing work of God? Only through repentance of sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Jesus will one day return to receive His bride and heal our brokenness. But what should we do in the meantime?

We should foster a culture in our church that values the sacredness and permanency of marriage. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loves the church. Wives, submit to your husband as to the Lord.

Along those lines, we should provide hope and help to those struggling in their marriage. If you're struggling, please don't struggle in silence. Please don't wait until things blow up. Seek help now. I would love nothing more than to have the opportunity to minister to you in your time of difficulty. If we need to help you get connected with a professional counselor who will give you good, solid, biblical counsel, we'll do that. Let's be a church that is committed to building and maintaining strong, healthy marriages for the glory of God.

And finally, the church should be a place of healing and restoration for those who have experienced the pain of divorce. If you've been divorced, we love you. We're thankful for you. We want to help you heal. And we want you to experience full fellowship within the body of Christ.

Some of you this morning may have been carrying the pain, shame, and even guilt of a past divorce for a very long time. I want to encourage you this morning as we sing our song of invitation to cast all of that on Jesus. Your pain and shame and guilt were nailed to the cross with Him. There's no reason for you to bear it anymore. Will you let it go? Will you receive the grace and forgiveness that has been lavished on you by Jesus?

If you're here this morning and you're struggling in your marriage, would you trust your struggle in the hands of Jesus? He is able to bring about healing. He is able to bring about restoration. Not only is He able to make things like they once were; He's able to make your marriage better than it ever was before. If you'll turn to Him.