

***Introduction...***

If the Bible is telling us the truth about reality, then the universe and our place within it are not accidental, they are filled with divine purpose. If the Bible is telling us the truth about reality, then we know that there is purpose to everything, that time, matter and physics are not ultimate, and that our lives and how we live them truly matter. If the Bible is telling us the truth about reality, then we know that life and death are among the most important things, that love is worth dying for, that music does makes life better, that there is a time to laugh and a time to cry.

If the Bible is telling us the truth about reality, then we know that much of the popular cultural outlook is completely wrong. If the Bible is telling us the truth about reality, then we can know with certainty that God created mankind with marital romance in mind. In Genesis 2, God established **Marriage as the first cultural institution and it was established before the fall as a gift to us and a profound mystery that has something to do with God's plan for the world.**

Before there was a city, a school, a hospital, or even a church; God established a home in the Garden for Adam and Eve to enjoy as husband and wife. Marriage was God's plan and it did not come about as a social construct; rather it came down out of Heaven to occupy an exalted place in human history. **This is how the Bible starts. This is how God's story began.**

**At the beginning of Scripture and right on the heels of creation, God move very quickly from the creation of the universe to the marriage relationship between Adam and Eve? But why? Why does God put a man and a woman on center stage at the beginning of all things; because the story God wants to tell is a love story.** It is a love story that ultimately takes shape when Jesus, our perfect groom, comes to redeem His eternal bride, the church, from the sin that drove us from Him in the first place. Marriage is a picture of the gospel and this means that **there is more at stake in our understanding of marriage than we can imagine.**

***Transition...***

For this reason, we need to take Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce far more seriously than many of us do. In Jesus' day, there were some common cultural views on marriage and divorce. Those views were related to what Moses wrote in the book of Deuteronomy; but like many things the true meaning of God's word had been twisted to suit the desires of the day. The prevailing view at the time was that Marriage wasn't all that important, and so long as you provided a legal document of divorce one could walk away from marriage in a "no fault" kind of way.

But Jesus wants us to know that it is not that simple.

**Matt 5:31** "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'  
<sup>32</sup> But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Like most of what we have read in this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' teaching on the subject of marriage and divorce doesn't find wide acceptance in our present day. Modern sensibilities have not only downgraded the importance of marriage (Biblical) but have also reduced the significance of divorce.

Many of you have experienced divorce either personally or through someone close to you. Many of you still bear the scars from a divorce that took place within your family. Many of you look at divorce as one of the most difficult and shaping events of your life. Because of this it is

nearly impossible to talk about divorce or to teach on divorce in a way that will shield you from the stirring up of painful memories and emotions. It is not my intention to be offensive, it is however my intention and calling to be honest with you about what the Bible says and that may result in your being offended. May God show us grace as we navigate these waters together.

***Sermon Focus...***

## **I. What is Marriage?**

**Marriage was God's idea from the very beginning.** Marriage is not a human concept, or a social construct. Marriage is not simply a legal contract for the purpose of state recognized tax incentives. Marriage is not simply a way to propagate the human race, nor is it simply God approved mating.

According to **Genesis 2**, Marriage is an institution established by God and ordained by God at the very beginning of human history. God instituted marriage as the foundation for all of society. This is incredibly important for us to understand because when we see that marriage is God's idea we must also see that He is the one who establishes the rules that govern it.

In his book, ***Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel***, Ray Ortlund writes:

“Marriage is not a human invention; it is a divine revelation. Its design was never part of our own made up arrangement; it was given to us at the beginning of all things, as a bright shining monument of eternal significance. We might not always live up to its grandeur. None of us does so perfectly. But we have no right to redefine it, and we have every reason to revere it.”<sup>1</sup>

Marriage was designed by God as a way for a man and a woman to enter into one intimate relationship that *in part* would allow us to experience the intimacy that each of us truly longs for and to experience the type of intimacy that is perfected within the Godhead. At no other point in nature does  $1 + 1 = 1$  save in the marriage of a man and woman. In no other relationship in the universe does  $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$  save in the divine trinity. I believe that God designed marriage as a way of allowing us, His creatures, a taste of the intimacy that He enjoys in the godhead perfectly.

But there is more to the mystery of marriage and it is that the marriage relationship between a man and woman is to be a display of the gospel to the world. In **Ephesians 5** Paul tells us that marriage, flawed though it is because of sin, is to be a vivid display of the love that Jesus Christ has for His bride, and the submissive respect that the church has for her Lord

Marriage is God's idea and is therefore governed by God's Word. Marriage is the foundational institution upon which all of society and culture is built. Marriage is a covenant between one man and one woman in the eyes of God and for the duration of their lives. Marriage is a beautiful gift from God that beckons us to behold the sin-overcoming grace of God in Jesus.

But marriage, like everything else in this world is subject to sin. So, what happens when sin begins to affect our marriage?

## **II. Marriage is worth fighting for.**

**First, let's understand that Marriage is not the problem, sin is.** Sin is the result of our desire for pleasure, comfort or control, which overshadows our desire to please God. Sin is our natural selfish inclination to have what we want, when we want it and how we want it. When you take two people

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Ortlund, ***Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel*** (preface)

who are both plagued by this problem and you put them into the same house together, it gets messy quick.

It's especially difficult in the first year of marriage because that year is largely about getting to know one another and getting to know yourself. Marriage is intended to produce intimacy between a husband and wife and that intimacy is not easily gained, it must be pursued and fought for. Some days you take two steps forward in intimacy, the next day you might take one step back.

**But what happens when sin crowds out intimacy? What happens when a husband gets to know his wife, but he fails to learn anything about himself? What happens when desire gives way to sin and sin gives way to fighting and we haven't learned how to fight fair? What are we to do when marriage becomes difficult?**

**Friends, I want to encourage you that your marriage is worth fighting for and I want to offer you 6 weapons that you need to use regularly as you battle to have a godly marriage.**

**1. Remember Your Vows** - We don't often make vows in life, in fact the Scriptures are going to warn us against making vows rashly. But when we make a vow before our spouse, our pastor, our family, our friends and before God; it is no small thing. And yet, how often do we simply forget the vows we made to love in sickness and in health, to love for richer or for poorer, to love until *death do us part*.

Often times, we make those vows with no integrity at all. What we really mean is I'll love you as long as it's good, because we all have the hope and expectation that it will be good. But when it gets difficult we need to remember that we made a commitment before God to love our spouse and that is going to be difficult at times.

**Loving your spouse is going to mean that you forego your own happiness at times, and that's OK because marriage is not primarily about your happiness, it's much more about your holiness.** Marriage is one of the most powerful tools in God's toolbox when it comes to our growth in godliness.

**2. Remember the Word of God** - When Leigh and I got married in 2001 we very quickly moved 9 hours away to Kansas City, MO where I was enrolled in Seminary. I had just completed my undergrad and Leigh was still working on hers when we got married and moved away from both of our families and our home church.

We had gone through pre-marital counseling and it was a big help, but nothing really prepared us for the first couple of months of being married and being alone in a place that was foreign to us. Those first few months were hard, but they were beautiful in that we had nowhere else to turn but to the Word of God and to one another in order to work out our problems.

We learned to navigate the ups and downs of married life together and with our Bibles open. I praise God for those years and for the instruction that I received from the Word on how to love my wife, how to encourage her, how to listen to her, how to wash her with the water of the Word, how to be gentle with her, how to care for her, and the truth is I am still learning.

**3. Relate to your Spouse** - In conflict the worst thing you can do is to wall yourself off from your husband or your wife. Talk to one another. Listen to one another and work on the problems together. But don't wait until things get bad to try and work on your relationship. Turn off the TV, put down your phone, close your computer and simply talk to one another. Facebook can wait but your wife shouldn't have to.

**4. Repent of Your Sin** – Our initial response is usually that the problem is not with me, it's with her. But consider that the problem you are having in your marriage is not primarily about your spouse. It may be that you are the one that is most in need of growth. Most of us are really good at pointing out the faults in our spouse, but we are terrible at seeing our own.

So be honest with yourself and with your spouses. Be willing to see what the real problem is and when the problem reveals your sin or shortcoming, be the first to ask for forgiveness and to repent.

This is another place where the Word of God is going to be critical for us, but let me caution you to use the Word like a band-aid and not like a baseball bat. When my kids get a cut or a bruise a band-aid just makes it all better because it comforts the hurt, it covers the wound and it holds out the promise of healing over time. That's how we should use the Word in our marriages, to comfort our hurts, to cover our wounds and to bring growth and healing over time.

Where truth needs to be spoken firmly, **speak** but check your motives before you wade into war. We need to wash each other with the word, which implies gentleness. We need to "live with our wives in an understanding way, showing honor (**I Pet 3:7**)."

**5. Receive Godly Counsel** – Contrary to our own opinion, we are not always the wisest people in the world. There are times when we need to receive the counsel of other Godly men and women, and we need to be prepared to follow it. **There are two steps to receiving counsel, hearing and following. Don't reject the counsel of another simply because it is difficult, if the council is Biblically sound and contextually appropriate, follow it.** If you are not sure if it meets those criteria, then include other counselors in the process.

**Proverbs 11:14** Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.

**6. Be Reconciled to Your Spouse** – We live in a day when divorce is put on the table before most other steps are taken. **But the pursuit of reconciliation is the posture of Gospel people.** Reconciliation can only happen when sin is confessed and forgiven. But it *can* happen and should happen in the lives of Christians because we are a people whose lives are defined by reconciliation.

Of all people, Christians should be those who champion confession of sin and the forgiveness that follows, because we are those who have confessed our sin and found forgiveness in Christ. We should be those who wait patiently for and who fight for reconciliation because we have been reconciled to God, many of us after years of sinful rebellion.

Now, that we have talked about what marriage is and some ways that we can fight for our marriage, let's talk about the other side of this passage in **Matthew 5**.

### III. What is divorce?

**Matt 5:31** "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'  
<sup>32</sup> But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

**Jesus addresses the issue of divorce in all of the gospels** and when he does he is not only addressing divorce itself but also the current controversy that was taking place between the rival

rabbinic schools of Hillel and Shammai. You can see the debate much more clearly by reading **Matthew 19**.

**Matt 19:3** And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" <sup>4</sup>He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup> and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." <sup>7</sup> They said to him, "Why then did Moses **command** one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?"

In **Deut 24**, Moses allowed for a man to divorce his wife if she *found no favor in his eyes because he found some indecency in her*. **Shammai** taught that the indecency Moses referred to was adultery, but others broadened their interpretation. Some rabbis such as **Hillel**, taught that if a wife spoiled dinner a man had a right to divorce her. Another named **Akiba**, allowed for divorce if the man found a woman that was prettier.<sup>2</sup>

The actual phrase in Deuteronomy refers to a scandalous act of sexual misconduct, which means that these latter interpretations are not only wrong, but they are mocking the sanctity of Marriage. They are using the letter of the law as a way to justify their sinful desires. Jesus clearly sides with the more conservative school on this issue, but He's going to go even further than that.

<sup>8</sup>He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses **allowed** you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. <sup>9</sup> And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

Notice that the Pharisees say that Moses **commanded** divorce, but Jesus points out that Moses **allowed** for divorce. God allowed for divorce **as an act of grace intended to cover the shame of sin within us and within our marriage. But divorce is never commanded and it is only permitted in very specific circumstances.**

Jesus' teaching on divorce is clear. He restricts divorce in every circumstance but sexual immorality (adultery) and desertion by an unbeliever.

**Matt 5:32** But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

**Matt 19:9** And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

**1 Corinthians 7:12** To the rest I say... that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. <sup>13</sup> If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him... <sup>15</sup> **But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved (*Is Free*). God has called you to peace.**

So there are three principles we need to understand and follow from these passages when it comes to divorce.

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<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *Luke* (TNTC, pg 275).

- 1. Divorce is permitted, but not required, on the ground of sexual immorality.**
- 2. Divorce is permitted, but not required, on the ground of desertion by an unbelieving spouse.**
- 3. When the divorce was not permissible, any subsequent remarriage (to someone other than the original spouse) results in adultery.**

But what about those whose divorce was permissible? When the divorce was legitimate, I believe, a person is free to remarry. I believe that when Jesus uses the exception clause in **Matthew 5 and 19** which allows for divorce that it also gives that person the freedom to remarry. At the same time, I believe that Paul is supporting this idea in **I Cor 7:15** when he says that the Christian who was abandoned by an unbelieving spouse is “free” or “not enslaved.”

**There are some guys whom I greatly respect who would disagree with me on this.** Some would agree that divorce is permissible in the case of those two exceptions, but that remarriage is not. And it really comes down to what Paul means by “free” in I Cor and whether or not Jesus’ exception applies to both divorce and remarriage. I think free means free from covenant responsibilities and therefore free to remarry. I think the exception modifies both.

**But how would Jesus’ audience understand this teaching?** Here’s a pretty strong statement on that issue from Kevin DeYoung...

“All scholars on every side of this divorce and remarriage debate agree that it was a given for first century Jews that remarriage was a valid option after a valid divorce. To be granted a legal separation meant de facto that you were no longer bound to anyone and thus free to remarry. No one in Jesus audience was thinking that remarriage wouldn’t be an option.”<sup>3</sup>

**In situations where the divorce was permissible, remarriage is also permissible.** This does not mean that you should run out and be married again, but I believe that it is permissible for you to do so.

### **Conclusion...**

I know that this sermon has probably raised a ton of questions in your minds. Many of these questions are difficult because they don’t fit neatly into a Biblical scenario and they are difficult because of the emotion involved. But we can’t let complexity or emotion drown out God’s Word. So, in closing I want to address 4 groups of people this morning.

**1. To those who are married** I want to urge you to not only **stay married** but also to **fight for your marriage, work at your marriage, pray for your marriage and guard your marriage.** Just because things are good for you right now doesn’t mean that you are not open to temptation and just because things are bad right now doesn’t mean that your marriage can’t get gloriously better. Remember your vows, remember the Word, work on your relationship, repent of your sin, receive Godly counsel, and above all seek reconciliation.

**2. To those who are single** I want you to know that to find a godly spouse is to find a good thing. But, both Jesus and Paul are clear that a full and godly life can be lived in singleness. Read **I Corinthians 7** and meditate on its instruction. Focus on the fact that the true aim of a disciple of

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<sup>3</sup> Keving DeYoung sermon notes *What Did Jesus Think of Divorce and Remarriage?*

Christ is to be devoted to the Lord in all things. Marriage is a beautiful gift from God but your manhood or womanhood is no less intact because of your singleness.

**3. To those who are divorced but shouldn't be** I want you to know that divorce is not an unpardonable sin. There is grace in Christ that is more than a match for your sin. I want to urge you to find forgiveness at the cross and let the kindness of the Lord bring you to fresh repentance and then as much as you are able, seek reconciliation. In Christ, there is always the hope of reconciliation but if that doesn't happen, don't seek remarriage with someone else.

**4. To those who were improperly divorced and now remarried** I think you should follow Paul's instruction and *stay as you are* but seek forgiveness and repentance for your past sins. I would also urge you to make amends with your ex-spouse, your children, your family, your friends, and your church. I would urge you to also find the grace and mercy of Christ to be enough to satisfy the guilt of your past. But I would also challenge you to guard your current marriage with newfound wisdom, strength and purpose.

Marriage is a gift from God, but sin is still our enemy. Jesus shows us grace when he allows for divorce in certain cases, but He reminds us in these passages that this whole issue of divorce is really brought about by our hardness of heart. Marriage is supposed to be this grand thing that gives us a taste of true intimacy. It is also the grand theme of the story of redemption that God is writing for all the world to see.

That gospel story is ultimately a story of reconciliation. It is the story of how an infinitely patient and loving God has pursued and won back His often adulterous and wayward bride. If you are a believer in Christ today then you are the product of God's reconciling work and you have the promise of His Word that He nothing can ever separate you from His love, He will never divorce you.