

# Singleness, Marriage, and Divorce

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[0:00] Please open your Bibles with me to Matthew chapter 19. If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand. We'd love to give you a copy of it you can use. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Sean.

I'm one of the pastors of Trinity Campus Church along with Ed. It's my great joy and privilege to preach God's word to you this morning. We're in Matthew 19.

Verses 1 to 12. Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word. Heavenly Father, I come to this pulpit with fear and trembling.

How can it be, Lord, that you entrust your eternal, infallible word? Lord, to people like us.

Lord, help me to say only what you want me to say. And give all those who are here years to hear, hearts to understand, humility to receive and obey all that you have for us in your word.

[1:34] and we ask, God, that you would magnify the love of Christ, your son, Lord, our bridegroom, our Lord and Savior, that we may walk away from this worship gathering with the deeper knowledge and experience of the love of Christ.

Lord, address us now from your word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please stand, if you're able, to honor God as we read from his word.

Matthew 19, 1 through 12. Now, when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.

And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?

He answered, Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female? 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.

[3:07] So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What, therefore, God has joined together, let not man separate.

They said to him, Why, then, did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away? 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.

And I say to you, Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery. The disciples said to him, If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.

But he said to them, Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Let the one who is able to receive this receive it. This is God's holy and authoritative word. Please be seated. According to Wilkinson and Thinkbainer, a specialized law firm focusing on family law and divorce, based here in Massachusetts, 41% of all first marriages end in divorce.

[4:47] 41%. If you think, Well, if you don't get it right the first time, anyone can get it wrong the first time. If at first you don't succeed, then try, try again. Right? Second marriage is fair, no better.

60% of all second marriages end in divorce. If you think, Well, the third time is the charm. Then think again.

Because 73% of third marriages end in divorce. The more times you get married, the higher the chance that you'll get divorced. In the U.S., there's a divorce every 42 seconds.

In the time that it takes for a couple that's getting married to recite their marriage vows, approximately two minutes, there will be three divorces. But these numbers alone don't tell the full story.

Think of all the estranged relationships, the broken hearts, the shattered dreams, the disrupted lives, and financial hardship, and fatherless or motherless children that these numbers represent. [6:00] And yet, despite all the damage that the world, the flesh, and the devil have done to this sacred institution of marriage, that dream of marriage continues.

Every 16 seconds, a couple in the U.S. gets married. Every year, over 2 million people get married in our country. The late pastor Tim Keller put it well in his book, *The Meaning of Marriage*.

To be loved, but not known, is comforting, but superficial. To be known and not loved, is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved, is, well, a lot like being loved by God.

It is what we need, more than anything. And that is precisely what people seek in marriage. To be fully known, with all your faults, and all your foibles, and all your idiosyncrasies, and all your blemishes, and yet to be truly loved.

To be fully seen, and yet not rejected. To be naked, yet unashamed. But is it possible? Not only is it possible, according to Jesus, it is imperative that we form marriages like this as Christians.

[7:26] Not perfectly, of course, but nonetheless, truly, obedient Christians' marriages can reflect Christ's covenantal relationship with his church.

And that's my point this morning. Whether in singular devotion or lifelong marriage, we ought to portray our union with Christ. First, I'm going to talk about marriage.

Secondly, I'll talk about divorce. And third, I'll talk about singleness. Verse 1 reminds us where we are in the narrative of Jesus' journey. This is now, when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.

The clause, when Jesus had finished these sayings, is a key programmatic line in the Gospel of Matthew. I've mentioned to you multiple times in this series that the book is divided into five major sayings or five major discourses by Jesus.

And at the end of each discourse, you find this nearly identical concluding statement, when Jesus had finished these sayings. And this is now the final time that Jesus leaves Galilee and now he is going toward Jerusalem where he has predicted twice already and he will predict once more that he's going to suffer and die for the sins of his people.

[8:44] Jesus knows that that's where he's headed. He is going to Jerusalem right now. But even as he is headed there, he is crowded by people who are looking to be ministered to by him, people who want healing from him.

And yet, even as he faces death in the face, even as he is going ineluctably toward the cross, even with all those things on his mind, Jesus is not preoccupied with self-pity.

He compassionately gives himself to serve others and he heals all those who come to him. But as is often the case, when you become an object of people's acclaim and admiration, you also become an object of people's envy and rivalry.

So it says in verse three, The word test is the same word that is translated sometimes as tempt. It's the word that was used earlier in Matthew chapter four to describe the devil tempting Jesus. It's the same word that Jesus used to rebuke the devil by citing Deuteronomy 6.16, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test.

[10:00] And remarkably, throughout the gospel, the only people who are the subjects of this verb test are the devil and the Pharisees. They're the ones who want to see Jesus fail.

They're the ones who want to see Jesus fall flat on his face. The Pharisees and the Sadducees came to test Jesus earlier in chapter 16, verse one, and they'll plot again to entangle Jesus in his words and test him in chapter 22, verse 18, chapter 22, verse 35.

As they're doing here. And little do they know that they are in fact putting the Lord their God to the test because Jesus is the Son of God. They're not seeking to learn from Jesus by asking this question.

They're trying to test him by deliberately broaching a controversial hot button issue that they think they can use to pigeonhole Jesus and discredit him. It's possible that Jesus' opponents here, the Pharisees, have already heard his earlier teaching on divorce from chapter five, verse 31 and 32. There, Jesus put forward an extremely high standard for marriage. He quoted Deuteronomy 24, verse one, saying it was also said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.

[11:16] That's Deuteronomy 24, one. And then audaciously, right after saying that, Jesus set his own teaching up against the Old Testament law as a contrast, as an antithesis, saying, you have heard this from the Old Testament, 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.

This is a staggering claim of Jesus' divine teaching authority. How does Jesus think that he can overturn nearly two millennia of legal precedents and interpretive traditions surrounding the Old Testament law?

Moreover, the law of Moses is no mere human law. It is the law given by God himself. It's divine law. Who can give a definitive take on God's law?

Only God can do that. And that's exactly what Jesus is claiming. He's the Son of God. It seems likely that the Pharisees had caught wind of Jesus' controversial teaching there.

He had cited Deuteronomy 24, one, and then set it aside to put forward a more definitive fulfillment of that in the standard that he gave. And so later, in verse seven, the Pharisees themselves will cite Deuteronomy 24, one.

[12:40] And they're saying, in essence, to Jesus, you had the gall to contradict Moses, did you? Oh, now we've got you cornered.

Now we can finally expose you as a charlatan and for the false teacher that you are. So these Pharisees come with that attitude to test him by asking, is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?

Many historians note that in those days, there was a contentious debate between two Jewish rabbinical schools of thought. Shammai and Hillel were both contemporaries of Jesus and they were reputable rabbis with sizable followings.

The school of Shammai was the more conservative school, the more strict of the two, and they taught that a man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her.

They disallowed divorce for every case except some kind of sexual unfaithfulness and unchastity and in that case, they allowed Jews to divorce and to remarry.

[13:46] The school of Hillel, on the other hand, was the more liberal and permissive school of thought. They taught that a man may divorce his wife even if she spoiled a dish for him. You put sugar in my dish instead of salt?

Here, here's your certificate of divorce. This more permissive view, as is often the case in the sinful world, was the more popular view among the common people.

The Pharisees likely have this contemporary debate in their minds when they pose this question.

What do you say, Rabbi Jesus? Who do you side with, Shammai or Hillel? Give us your hot take.

We have heard you have quite the controversial opinion on this matter. They want to lure Jesus into this debate so they could trap him in his words. But Jesus, as he always does, rises above the fray.

He is no interest in siding with Shammai or Hillel. There's only one party that he is interested in being aligned with, and that is God. Jesus answers in verse 4, have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female?

[15:01] In Joshua 5.13, when Joshua, during the conquest of Canaan, sees the angelic being with the drawn sword in his hand, he asks him, are you for us or are you for our adversaries?

But the angel of the Lord answers, no, not either. No, but I am the commander of the Lord's army.

During the Civil War, someone asked Abraham Lincoln if he believed God was on his side, to which Lincoln answered, sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side.

My greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right. When you find yourself embroiled in fierce debates in our culture between conservatives and liberals and Republicans,

Democrats and black and white and Catholics and Protestants, Baptists and Presbyterians, cessations and continuationists and complementarians and egalitarians, don't just ask yourself whether a person's view or a person that you're talking to is aligned with your tribe or your party or not.

Instead, always ask yourself, what does God have to say about this matter? How does God's word bear on this issue? That's what Jesus does.

Have you not read God's word? He goes right back to Scripture, right back to Genesis 1, 27. Make it your highest concern to be in agreement with God, not with men, because God is always right.

[16:30] God took a rib from Adam's side and out of it he fashioned Eve to be a helpmate for Adam.

Therefore, for that reason, it says, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh. The woman literally means was taken out of man in Hebrew and therefore she will be reunited with man in marriage and they become one flesh.

The bone of my bones and the flesh of my flesh fused back together, so to speak. God created mankind as male and female, right, two complementary sexes precisely for this reason.

The word hold fast describes a man cleaving to or sticking to his wife like how flesh sticks to bone. It comes from a word that means glue or some kind of adhesive.

That same Hebrew word, the root word in that Hebrew is used in Isaiah 41, 7 to refer to a metal worker who welds metals together. In other words, God describes the one flesh union between a husband and wife in the strongest possible terms.

[17:55] God himself, so to speak, takes the hammer and anvil and forges marriages when it happens between a man and a woman. Weld it together. Then Jesus draws out the ethical implications of that union in verse 6.

So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. Once the two are joined, they are one flesh and divorcing is like tearing apart a single body, limb from limb.

It's mutilation. And this joining together in marriage was not the doing of a mere man. It says, What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.

Separate. Marriage must be conferred. It must be bestowed. Marriage is no mere affection or passion. It's not mere passion or love that makes a couple married.

It's not cohabitation that makes a couple married. It's not even the legal marriage certificate that makes the two people married. Because all governing authorities are instituted by God and ultimately subject to God.

[19:09] It is ultimately God who makes marriage. Takes a man and a woman and makes them married. This is an unflinching, unapologetic teaching on the indissolubility of marriage according to the will of God.

What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. Citing various human authorities to justify unbiblical divorce is like a student who fails to turn in his homework and then says to his teacher, well that other student told me I don't have to turn it in.

Who cares what the other student said? This is what the teacher said. The marital bond is permanent. It is lifelong.

It's because marriage is a binding covenant. Look at the strong terms in which God denounces the divorce habits of his people Israel, the nation of Judah, in Malachi 2, 13 to 16.

He says that God refuses to accept their sacrificial offerings. Why, they ask? Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth to whom you have been faithless.

[20:19] Though she is your companion and your wife by covenant, did he not make them one with the portion of the spirit in their union? And what was the one God's, and what was the one God's seeking?

Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts.

God himself has made the husband and wife one by giving them a portion of the spirit of God in their union. Isn't that remarkable? For this reason, the one who does not love his wife, and in the Hebrew, it's literally the one who hates his wife and divorces her, covers his own garment with the violence he has done to her by divorcing her.

No matter all the pretense nowadays about amicable divorces, don't all divorce ultimately stem from hatred of one's spouse?

That's what Deuteronomy 24.3 implies as well. It says that if the wife's husband hates her and writes a certificate of divorce, that's what you're saying when you divorce someone.

[21:40] I can't stand to live with you anymore. I don't love you anymore. I want to end this. A man who hates his wife and divorces her does a kind of spiritual violence to her, tearing apart that one flesh union forged by the spirit of God.

And she who forsakes the covenant of her youth forgets the covenant of her God, it says in Proverbs 2, verse 17. This unbreakability or indissolubility of marriage is a hallmark of all covenants.

Galatians 3.15 says, even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. How much more than for a God-made covenant of marriage?

Does anything then dissolve the marital bond? Romans 7, 1-3 says this, do you not know, brothers, that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?

For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive, but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.

[23:08] There is one thing that frees the married party from the covenant bond of marriage, and that is death. Notice how the Apostle Paul does not even mention divorce in this context.

We in our modern context tend to assume, well, of course, divorce dissolves the marriage, but that possibility doesn't even occur in this context. Only death dissolves the marriage bond.

1 Corinthians 7 is also very explicit in this regard. The whole chapter deals with principles for singleness in marriage and divorce and remarriage, and 1 Corinthians 7, 39 says a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives.

Notice the language of binding again. That's the technical term that conveys the indissolubility of marriage, and notice once again the one thing that makes the husband or wife unbound is the death of his or her spouse.

The verse continues, but if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes only in the Lord. Paul says explicitly here that Christians ought to marry only in the Lord, meaning other Christians.

[24:19] If you marry an unbeliever, you're not merely disregarding my pastoral advice or Ed's pastoral advice. You are disobeying the commandment of God. And notice once again that the option of remarriage only opens up once your spouse dies.

Widows and widowers may remarry, it says. When it comes to divorcees, however, Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 7, 10 to 11, Paul is not naive.

He adds the conditional caveat, but if she does divorce, because he knows well the sinful depravity of our world and the hardness of the human heart, this is not God's will.

And yet, Paul acknowledges that divorces happen, whether it's for something grave like sexual infidelity, abuse, or something frivolous. But even if she does separate from her husband, even if she divorces him, Paul adds, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. In the case of widows and widowers, Paul expressly says they are free to remarry. But in the case of divorcees, Paul expressly says they should remain unmarried or be reconciled to their spouse.

[25:55] Only remarriage option that remains to divorcees is not really a remarriage at all in a sense because it's being reconciled to your original spouse.

And the reasoning seems to be that remarriage to another shuts the door completely on the possibility of reconciliation. For Christians, reconciliation, not divorce and remarriage, is supposed to be the norm.

Paul also specifically addresses the situation when a Christian already finds him or herself married to a non-Christian. What should they do then? Since we're not supposed to be marrying unbelievers, should you then divorce your unbelieving spouse?

It says in 1 Corinthians 7, 12 to 15, if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.

But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases, the brother or sister is not enslaved. Even when a Christian is married to a non-Christian, marriage is such a sacred thing.

[27:09] He says that you should not divorce them. However, if the unbelieving spouse separates, and that word consistently refers to divorce in this chapter, because people who were separated were told to remain unmarried, the word separate here means divorce, if an unbelieving spouse divorces you, then he says, let it be.

With that said, if an unbelieving spouse abandons you, if he hooks up with another woman and moves out and starts living with her, instead, even if they're not divorcing you legally, I think that is in practice what they're doing.

You may not be divorced de jure, but you are divorced de facto. And I think in such cases, divorce is allowed. That's why I think Paul mentions it in 1 Corinthians 7.

This is why historically Reformed Christians have cited two grounds for divorce, biblical grounds for divorce, and one is sexual immorality and the other is desertion by an unbeliever, being divorced by an unbeliever.

It's really odd to call them grounds for divorce, however, because this is really a situation where you have no choice. Paul says, in such cases, the brother or sister is not enslaved.

[28:31] Some people take this to mean that the Christian who has been divorced by a non-Christian in this manner is free to remarry. However, it's important to note that Paul does not use the technical term for the dissolution of marriage here.

He does not say that they are free to be married like he did for the widows in verse 39. He does not say that they are not bound, which is a technical term. He says instead that they are not enslaved. And I think that different word choice is deliberate. Paul is not saying that a Christian who has been divorced by a non-Christian spouse is free to remarry. He's merely saying that even though he just told them in the strongest terms that they should not be divorced, even from an unbelieving spouse, if your unbelieving spouse is the one that's divorcing you, then let it be so.

You're not enslaved to the command that I've given you to preserve that marriage. Don't insist on being chained to your unbelieving spouse who wants to divorce you.

We can expect a Christian, a fellow Christian to repent of his sins or her sins and seek forgiveness and to pursue reconciliation. But how can you do that for an unbeliever who does not subscribe to your ethical standards according to the word of God?

[29:51] So then this verse, I don't think it has permission to remarry in view at all. And the testimony of all these passages are consistent. Only death dissolves the marriage bond.

Therefore widows may remarry but divorcees may not. For added credibility, Paul adds the parenthetical remark, not I, but the Lord in verses 10 to 11.

Saying that it's not him who's saying this but the Lord Jesus himself who gave the command not to divorce. And if you do, to remain unmarried or else be reconciled to your spouse. That's verses 10 to 11.

This is not because what Paul writes is not authoritative. Paul is an apostle of God. What he writes is authoritative for all believers. But rather what's going on is that these Corinthian believers as we know from the context of the letters were questioning and challenging Paul's apostolic credentials as we see in 1 Corinthians chapter 9.

So Paul is saying you won't take my word for it? You doubt my apostolic authority? Well, this isn't even just me. I'm just relaying to you what our Lord Jesus himself said.

[31:00] And did Jesus really teach that? Yes. Look at Mark 10, 11 to 12. Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her.

And if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery. Luke 16, 18. Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery.

And he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery. Adultery. And Luke 16, 18 for added effect comes immediately after Jesus saying that it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the law to become void.

And then Jesus is using the indissolubility of marriage as an illustration of the fact that not one word of God's law can become void. Think about how stark and clear these verses are.

What is adultery? Adultery is voluntary sexual relations between a married person and someone who is not his or her lawful spouse. In our society, when a man divorces his wife and marries another, we don't call that divorce.

[32:16] We call that remarriage. I'm sorry, I misspoke there. If you, if you, if in our society when a man divorces his wife and marries another, we don't call that adultery.

We call that remarriage. So why does Jesus call it adultery? He got divorced. That marriage is gone.

He marries another person. Why is that divorce? It's only, it's only adultery if you're still married and you have sexual relations with someone who is not your spouse.

The, the only logical conclusion we can arrive at from this is that remarriage after divorce is adultery according to Jesus because while adultery breaks the marriage vow, it does not break the marriage bond.

the covenant of marriage can be defiled, yes, but it cannot be dissolved.

[33:26] For this reason, the man who divorced his wife is still married in the eyes of God and vice versa. this should strike us, I think, strike us as a holy fear of God, of his inviolable word.

As Jesus says in John 10, 35, scripture cannot be broken. I think, I think, in our culture, we've lost the sense of honor of being a man or a woman of his or her word.

Being like Psalm 14 says, to be people who fear God, fear the Lord, and therefore, are willing to, who swear to their own hurt, who keep their word even when it hurts them.

When God declares a man and a woman husband and wife, he forges an unbreakable bond that endures for life. This is why traditional Christian wedding vows have always said, I take you 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 until death do us part.

Or in alternate renditions, as long as we both shall live. Isn't that what we all long for? To be fully known and truly loved.

[34:51] To mess up but to be forgiven again. To be accepted again. To have someone who loves us and is committed to us unreservedly. Come what may, hardship, heartache, sin and brokenness, I will stick by you and love you till the end.

Isn't that what covenantal love is? Covenantal love has at its heart the idea of constancy and sacrifice that makes the other person the focal point of your affection and service and love.

Contrast that with the contractual love of our age which has at its heart the idea of personal fulfillment and individual happiness which says, as long as you are meeting my needs, as long as you are making me happy, I'll love you.

And as soon as there's no personal benefit to begin, then the relationship is terminated. I wish people who think like that would change their wedding vows to make it more accurate.

I take you to be my wife, to have and to hold until you get poor, sick, ugly, or do me any wrong or simply stop making me happy. Where's the love in that?

[36:12] Where's the sacrifice? The commitment? That's not the kind of love God has shown us in Christ. Let's return to our passage in Matthew 19.

So far in verses 3 to 6, Jesus has said in the clearest terms that marriage is binding for life and that God does not want us to divorce. I think we're reading that correctly because that's exactly how the Pharisees understand Jesus.

But there is on the surface a discrepancy between the indissolubility of marriage that Jesus teaches here and the Old Testament case law regarding divorce. And the Pharisees harp on that contradiction and they say, aha!

We thought you might say this. Gotcha. Verse 7. Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away? But Jesus doesn't lose a beat.

He says in verse 8, because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. Divorce was a temporary provision for a broken, fallen world.

[37:22] A concession to the hardness of the human heart intended to mitigate human failure and evil not to establish the divine standard. The provision for a certificate of divorce served to protect vulnerable women from being taken advantage of.

When sinful men divorce their wives when they should not have, they were required to provide a certificate of divorce, which in a sense is like a clean bill of health, so to speak, so that she does not come under undue suspicion and she is given legal rights so that she can remarry because apart from that in that day and age, she may not have the means to provide for herself and survive.

I've used this illustration before, but if you deliver a box of clean syringes to a neighborhood wracked by drug addiction so that people don't kill themselves using contaminated syringes, can those drug addicts then turn around and claim to be law-abiding citizens?

Oh, we're law-abiding citizens. Look at this. Look at these syringes that we're using. They're provided for by the government. No, of course not. They're still doing illegal drugs. The syringes are merely a concession to the human evil, to mitigate human evil, not to establish the ethical standard. Notice the contrast between the way the Pharisees allude to the law of Moses in verse 7 and the way Jesus speaks of it in verse 8. The Pharisees say, why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?

[39:04] But Jesus responds, because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning, it was not so. In the original context of Deuteronomy 24, 1 to 4, the divorce is described, not prescribed.

The command of the passage is not to divorce, but that the one who has been divorced and then subsequently remarries, may not, after that marriage fails or is widowed, cannot return to the first original spouse.

That's the command of Deuteronomy 24, verse 4. A second marriage defiles the original marriage so that God forbids reunification with the first spouse. So Jesus is right.

Mosaic law made concessions to the reality of divorce, but it never commanded divorce. God's command from the beginning was not so. Then with the formal kind of serious gravity, with the formal asseveration, Jesus summarizes his teaching in Matthew 19, verse 9.

And I say to you, this is his authoritative pronouncement, whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another commits adultery. This verse, at first glance, appears to throw a wrench into what Jesus has been saying all along about the indissolubility of marriage.

[40:27] not only does he seem to say that divorce is allowed in the case of sexual immorality, he also seems to say that remarriage is allowed if the divorce was due to sexual immorality.

Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, that's easy enough to understand, but what's hard to understand is the exception clause, except for sexual immorality. Because that exception clause sits between whoever divorces his wife and marries another, and because it's the remarriage that constitutes adultery, many people and most interpreters nowadays, most evangelical interpreters nowadays, take this to mean that the exception clause must apply to both the divorce and the remarriage.

Remarriage after divorce is adultery, except if the divorce was finalized on the grounds of sexual immorality. Then the divorce is legal and valid, and therefore subsequent marriage is also legal and valid.

that's the majority view of Protestant scholars nowadays. I would also interpret verse nine as they do if this were the Bible's only teaching on divorce and remarriage.

But it's not. First, this flies in the face, this interpretation of verse nine flies in the face of all the passages that we've looked at so far.

[41:54] Romans 7, 1-3, 1 Corinthians 7, Mark 10, 11-12, Luke 16, 18, about how only death dissolves the marriage covenant. Second, a good hermeneutical interpreted principle is that Scripture interprets Scripture.

Even though the Bible has many human authors, it also has a single divine author who is above them and in and through them all. Therefore, Scripture is never going to contradict itself.

So then a good practice when you're interpreting God's Word is to let the clear passages of Scripture illuminate, elucidate, classify the obscure and difficult passages of Scripture.

And this verse nine, Matthew 19, nine, is the most difficult verse when it comes to ascertaining the Bible's teaching on divorce and remarriage. And good news for us is that there is a far clearer verse, not far away from here, right here in the Gospel of Matthew.

And it's Matthew 5, 32. Everyone who divorces his wife except on the ground of sexual immorality makes her commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

[43:07] A man who divorces his wife makes her commit adultery. How is that so? In a culture where most women do not work, marriage and child rearing are their primary vocation.

That's their work. In such a culture, a divorced woman would usually have no recourse for survival and would promptly have to seek remarriage. For this reason, if a man divorces his wife, he would be guilty of making her commit adultery since she has to remarry.

And that constitutes adultery. So then, what does the exception clause mean in this instance?

Except on the ground of sexual immorality. If the man divorced his wife because of her sexual immorality, then he is not guilty of making her commit adultery.

Why is that? It's obvious. Because she already committed adultery. You guys following what I'm saying? Because of her own sexual immorality, and that's why she was divorced, the husband then is not guilty of making her commit adultery by divorcing her.

The exception clause, the purpose of the exception clause is to exempt the husband or the wife, whoever is doing the divorcing, from the guilt of making their spouse commit adultery when they had already committed adultery.

[44:37] Now, keep that in mind because that's very helpful for making sense of Matthew 19. 19. This is my take. Matthew 19 is an abbreviated form of Matthew 5.32.

In other words, there's an ellipsis here, which is an omission from a sentence of words that would otherwise complete a thought or clarify a construction. And we often employ ellipsis in common speech, and I think this is an instance of ellipsis.

In other words, Matthew 19.9 is a shorter, spliced together version of Matthew 5.32, and it assumes the context of Matthew 5.32, since Jesus has already taught on this issue once before in the same gospel.

And so if we were to fill out the missing ellipsis, it would read like this, and I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and if he marries another, regardless of whether he divorced her for that reason or not, commits adultery.

The exception clause applies only to the divorce in this construction, and it's there then once again serving the same purpose as Matthew 5.32, to exempt the husband or the wife, whoever's doing the divorcing, from the charge of making their spouse commit adultery in the event that they divorced him or her because of their sexual immorality.

[46:06] adultery. So the second half of Matthew 19.9 actually complements the second half of Matthew 5.32. In Matthew 5.32, it says that whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Matthew 19.9 says that the man who marries another after divorcing also commits adultery. So by putting this picture together, it's saying that the charge applies equally to the man who did the divorcing and to the woman who was divorced.

Because this is a minority view among modern Protestant scholars, initially when I came to this conclusion in my exegesis, studying this passage for several years, I was very hesitant and insecure about my position, and I started surveying church history to see what Christians, faithful teachers of God's word throughout history have said, and every single church father, every single one, has taught the view that I'm presenting here.

The earliest church fathers from the time of Jesus in Western Christianity for the first 1,600 years of Western Christianity, this was the majority view.

This was the only view. Let me give you some examples. This is from 80 A.D. within the lifetime of Jesus' own disciples.

[47:41] From the shepherd of Hermas, it says, what then shall the husband do? If the wife continues in this disposition of adultery, let him divorce her, and let the husband remain single.

But if he divorces his wife and marry another, he too commits adultery. Look at Clement of Alexandria. This is from A.D. 208.

That scripture counsels marriage, however, and never allows any release from the union, is expressly contained in the law. You shall not divorce a wife except for reason of immorality. And regards as adultery the marriage of a spouse while the one from whom a separation was made is still alive.

Whoever takes a divorced woman as wife commits adultery, it says, for if anyone divorces his wife, he debauches her. That is, he compels her to commit adultery. And not only does he that divorce her become the cause of this, but he that takes the woman and gives her the opportunity of sinning, for if he did not take her, she would return to her husband.

But, Augustine says the same thing in several places in his writing. He says, neither can it rightly be held that a husband who dismisses his wife because of fornication and marries another does not commit adultery.

[49:01] For there is also adultery on the part of those who, after the repudiation of their former wives because of fornication, marry others. Again and again and again.

And I find it very hard to dismiss the consistent testimony of the church fathers. Because they, it's, we can't dismiss them saying like, oh, these church fathers, they didn't understand God's word because they were so ascetic.

They had these views against, and they didn't like marriage. They liked celibacy. And so, they, you can't trust them to preach effectively on these issues. That's not the case. Hermes was, Hermes was married.

Clement speaks very positively and highly of marriage. And yet, they held a view that is so contradictory to anything else that they have ever seen in Jewish society and in Greco-Roman society.

Why did they hold such crazy views? They came up with it all of their own accord. For the first 1600 years of Western Christianity, I don't think so. I think they held that counter-cultural view because Jesus taught it.

[50:16] But why is it sexual immorality that provides the only grounds for divorce in this case? 1 Corinthians 6, 15 to 18 shed some light on that.

Do you know, do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never. Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her?

For as it is written, the two will become one flesh. But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

Paul here makes the distinction between sexual immorality and every other sin. He says only sexual immorality is a sin against your own body.

And that's a curious thing because there are other things that negatively affect our bodies like gluttony and drunkenness and self-injury and cutting and drug abuse. These are also against our own body, are they not?

[51:19] And yet, in Paul's sense, no, they are not against the body in the same way that sexual immorality is because every other sin a person commits is outside the body. sexual immorality does violence to your spiritual union, your union with Christ himself.

You've been united to Christ through faith and now you are going to unite him by becoming one flesh with a prostitute. With a prostitute, it's an unthinkable thing, Paul is saying.

Because of the one flesh union between husband and wife, sexual immorality does violence to that commitment and covenant in a way that no other sin does, which is why it is the only grounds for divorce that Jesus specifies.

However, I still don't think that this means that if you divorce because of your spouse's sexual immorality that you may divorce them and remarry. Even though it serves somewhat as a grounds for divorce, Jesus never commands divorce, even when you are hurt by sexual immorality of your spouse.

And I can think of two pragmatic reasons, practical reasons why you don't want to do that. Because one, if you remarry, it forecloses the possibility of reconciliation, which we were told in 1 Corinthians 7 is a goal when you are divorced from your spouse.

[52:48] Once you remarry, you can't go back to your first spouse. Secondly, in a strange way, saying that you can remarry someone after divorce only if there is sexual immorality involved almost incentivizes sexual immorality.

Because if you think about it, there's people who hold the view that you may divorce and remarry in the case of sexual immorality often argue that only the innocent party may remarry.

But it's hard to make that case because if, in their view, it's the sex itself, the sexual immorality itself that dissolves the marriage covenant, then both the guilty and the innocent party are freed from that marriage bond.

Are they not? If the sexual immorality is what dissolves the marriage bond, so then you can't rightly hold that only the innocent party may remarry. Both the innocent party and the guilty party should be free to remarry, because their first covenant is dissolved.

And yet, that's not what God's word says. And if that's the case, then an innocent party, someone, a woman who was divorced for no good reason at all, may not remarry, but a woman who was divorced because of adultery may remarry.

[54:11] In Luke 16, 18, let's look at it. It said, everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery. And he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery. The first half of the verse already has in view a man who divorces his wife and marries someone else.

The second half has in view the man who marries the woman who was divorced from that first man. And if the first clause has in view a man who has already divorced and married another and has therefore committed adultery against his original wife, then doesn't that wife now have valid biblical grounds to remarry?

Shouldn't she then be permitted legally to remarry? But Jesus simply says, he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery. He does not say, he who marries a woman divorced from her husband before he remarries commits adultery.

So how do you apply this? There's so many ways this cuts into our culture. If you're living with someone, you're cohabiting with someone and you're not married, make it official.

Marry the person. Make the covenant that's meant to safeguard the precious gift of that sexual intimacy.

[55:33] If you are single, you're not married, but you're fornicating, you're having premarital sex. Confess that sin to others. Get as much help as you can.

Because that sacred gift should not, you should not defraud your partner of that precious gift. You should not take it from them before you have made the covenant and the promise to safeguard them and to steward it.

And if you're a married man, follow what 1 Timothy 3 says. In order to be an elder in a church, you have to be a one-woman man.

1 Timothy 5 says that if you are going to be a widow, an elderly widow, who deserves to be supported financially fully by the church, then that widow must meet certain qualifications. And one of them is that she must have been, during her time of marriage, a one-man woman.

That's the ideal, the Christian ideal, to be a one-woman man or a one-man woman. If you're married, have eyes for one woman only. Have hearts for one woman only.

[56:43] Have bodies for one woman only. That's the teaching of God's word. And when Jesus says this, my goodness, guys, I'm so sorry.

I should have been done 15 minutes ago. I'll try to wrap it up. He says in Matthew 19, looking at verse 10, if you think that's an impossibly high standard, I think you're also understanding that correctly.

Because look at what the disciples say in verse 10. If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry. They're throwing up their hands in the air and saying, it's better not to marry. What is this? It's like, you should have just picked one, Shammai or Hillel. Like, what is this? He said to them, not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.

So, there's controversy around this too. What is this saying that Jesus is talking about? Is he talking about what the disciples just said, it is better not to marry?

[58:01] Or is he talking about what he said earlier on about divorce and remarriage? Now, I think he's referring to what he said, what Jesus said earlier on. Why do I think that?

Because, as I mentioned to you earlier, the word saying is a key word in the Gospel of Matthew. It refers again and again to Jesus' sayings.

Matthew is organized around the sayings of Jesus. And earlier in verse 1, he said, now when Jesus had finished these sayings. And not only that, in verse 9, he officially and formally declared his saying.

Saying, and I say to you, which is a verbal form of the word saying, whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another commits adultery.

And throughout the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus doesn't give this kind of weight to the things that the disciples say in their bumbling failure to understand. Oh, it's better not to marry.

[59:01] And Jesus is not saying, oh, that saying, you know, no one can receive that unless God helps them. That's not what he's saying. He's talking about what he said in the preceding verses. If you really follow what Jesus is saying, and that's really the standard, the high standard for marriage, and if your wife cheats on you, and then you divorce her, and you cannot get married, you could never have sex again.

What, Jesus? Better not to marry. And Jesus understands exactly what they're saying because he then starts talking about eunuchs.

For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, they can't help it. They were born that way, genetic defect. And there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, people who are castrated to serve on royal courts or whatnot so that they don't impregnate the royal wives or whatever.

And there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this, receive it.

Does that remind you of something? Let the one who is able to receive this, receive it. He was saying stuff like that in chapter 13 when he was talking about the parables of the kingdom. And here he mentions kingdom of heaven again for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

[60:27] Matthew 13, verse 9, and he who has ears let him hear. Matthew 13, 11, and he answered them, to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom, but to them it has not been given. Chapter 13, verse 20, as for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word immediately and receives it with joy.

Who are the people who can receive this saying? They're the ones to whom God reveals it. They're the chosen people of God. And these bumbling disciples don't get it fully now like they didn't get the previous parables that Jesus taught, but they will because they are one of his people.

Even when you don't get to use the natural function of your body in sexual intercourse because you were unfairly divorced by the infidelity of your own spouse, God says you do it to honor God.

You do it out of fear of the Lord. You do it to honor the sanctity of marriage. And it's like, almost like castrating yourself as a eunuch for the kingdom, for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

And that gives hope to unmarried singles as well. You can't rightly practice that desire for intimacy and sexual intercourse until you get married.

[61:47] You're like a eunuch in that sense. You burn with passion. You long for it. You're lonely. You want that companionship and physical intimacy. And yet, to hold out and to wait and say, I will safeguard and protect the covenant of marriage.

I will save myself for marriage. I will be a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. To people like that, it's this promise that God had given in Isaiah 56 is true.

And let not the eunuch say, behold, I am a dry tree. For thus says the Lord to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant. I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. Isn't this what we saw in our call to worship from Isaiah chapter 54 and our assurance of pardon in Ephesians 5? God says, your maker is your husband to his people. That's God's plan from the beginning. And this is why, even though in the Old Testament the standard was based on Genesis, it is not good for a man to be alone.

[63:09] In the New Testament times, singleness is elevated and they say that it is better if you can remain single to remain single so that you are not anxious about pleasing other people.

Rather, you could have a singular, undivided devotion to God. That's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7. Why did the standards change? Because Jesus has come right down in the middle and he has fulfilled what marriage was intended to point to from the very beginning. And marriage is meant to be a picture of the Christ and the church. Haven't we sinned? And this is the greatest and most important reason why God holds marriage in such high esteem. Haven't we all sinned against him? Haven't we all whored after idols? That's what God says. We have whored after idols.

Isn't that why he tells Hosea, his prophet, to take for himself a wife of whoredom? And what do you expect a wife of whoredom to do?

[64:16] He loved her. He had children with her. And then she prostitutes herself with other men. She sells herself into slavery to pimps. And then God tells Hosea in chapter 3, Go!

Go again! Love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods.

Can you imagine the betrayal and the pain? The person that you loved more than anyone else, the person you gave everything to, you exposed everything to, that you gave your very self to, to go to another man.

That's what we've done to God. And did God sumnerly dismiss us?

No. He came to reclaim his bride. Hosea buys back his wife, redeems her according to the command of the Lord.

[65:33] That's what God has done in sending his own son to come and redeem the bride for himself, to reclaim his bride chosen from before the foundation of the world, to say, you are mine, and just cleanse her and sanctify her with his own blood by dying on the cross for our sins.

That means no Christian can say I am unwanted. No Christian can say I am not loved. No Christian can say no one understands.

I'm lonely. There's no one besides me. I'm a eunuch. I'm a dry tree. No, you're not. You are loved more than you will ever know.

You have been pursued. Our Lord Jesus Christ, he left his father's house to hold fast, to cleave, to stick to, to be welded to his wife.

And that is you, the bride of Christ. And if that's the picture God wants to show the watching world, yeah, I'll gladly hold up that impossibly high standard of marriage.

[67:03] If people can see my suffering, my hard life, and they can see, oh, I see how much Jesus loves his bride. That's the point.

God, please help us to obey this command. Help us to honor marriage so that in so doing we can hold up the gospel of Jesus Christ for all the world to see.

For they are so confused and lost, Lord, reveal to them the love of Christ. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.