

Jesus and Divorce

a sermon in the series
Sermon on the Mount

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Matthew 5:31-32

*Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'
32 But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.*

How does a marriage end up in divorce?

In the days of our Lord only men could divorce their wives. Jewish women could not divorce their husbands. There was an exception to that, but it was very minor and very rare. On the whole, Jewish wives could not divorce their husbands.

A large portion of the Pharisees taught that a husband could divorce his wife, or even put her out without a bill of divorcement, for something as little as badly preparing his meal or not putting enough starch in his collar. This particular school of rabbis believed that a husband, if he ever became displeased with his wife, had biblical grounds to dismiss her and then marry someone else. A smaller group of Pharisees believed only in the case of adultery could a wife be divorced.

It's safe to say the marriage philosophy of the Pharisees who believed for any reason you could divorce your wife, was a wife was for the pleasure of the husband. She was to serve and do, as he desired. She was there for her husband's every whim and wish. She should not expect to be loved and served by her husband; she was to love and serve him. So if a man didn't feel his wife was doing an adequate job in pleasing him he would divorce her. This was predominant in Jewish culture—wives were the properties of their husbands.

In our culture both husband and wife can divorce each other and American society says any reason is sufficient to hire an attorney and sue for a divorce. Courts in America have made divorce easy and no-fault. My question is how do marriages end up in divorce if there is no fault and no one to blame?

In our culture both husband and wife can play the game, 'What's in it for me?' The reason so many marriages, even "Christian" marriages end up in divorce is selfishness. This was the problem of the Pharisees and Jewish men who thought their wives were for their personal satisfaction. When you as a husband or wife look to your spouse and say, *they're there for me. They are there for*

my pleasure. They are there for my happiness. I married you so you could please me and make my life wonderful, you put on them an impossible task they cannot fulfill. You set them and your marriage up for failure.

I've learned to have a happy marriage is to not expect my wife to make me happy. When I came to that conclusion and freed her from that demand, she's made me so wondrously happy. Marriages end because somebody is looking to the other to be their satisfaction and happiness. This is not the purpose of marriage. Therefore, Jesus came along and upset the traditional view of marriage and divorce. He, with all His authority, rebuked His culture that treated women as property and rebukes our culture that treats marriage with disdain and vulgarity.

In our text today, Jesus is speaking to us, not just to them, and He says to you and I, *I am against any culture that demeans marriage and makes it selfish rather than selfless, base rather than holy.* Here in this text Jesus decried His own culture and decries our culture that makes divorce so easy. With power He's bringing clarity to what the law of God says about divorce.

Now I realize that this subject cannot be discussed without stirring up painful memories or wounding the conscience about something that cannot be changed. Very few families are without someone who has been divorced. Many of you have gone through this nightmare called divorce. I want to say to you, I wish you no ill in this message. I don't desire to inflict pain, or open wounds, or keep fresh wounds from healing.

So why then am I preaching on this subject? Two reasons.

1. Jesus did.

Jesus spoke about it because we need to hear what He had to say. Here in our text He says something that demands our attention whether married or unmarried.

2. I want to prevent further pain.

I wish no one listening to ever go through this great tragedy. So I pray my message today will be preventive as well as healing to those who have gone through divorce.

Here in verses thirty-one and thirty-two, Jesus continues His discussion about adultery from verses twenty-seven through thirty. In essence, He's saying you can be guilty of adultery not only by having sex with someone who is not your spouse or lusting after them in your heart, but also by violating the spirit of your vows and being unfaithful in your promises made to your spouse, even though you may remain sexually faithful. Jesus is cutting beyond the letter of the law and is getting to the very heart.

I. Historical Context of Marriage and Divorce

Let me first explain the historical context of the text.

The religious leaders of Jesus' day believed that writing a bill of divorcement commanded in Deuteronomy 24 made divorce sinless and acceptable to God. They taught that Moses commanded divorce. Their doctrine was divorce was not wrong because it was in the Law. They believed if a man had a problem with his wife that Moses said he was to divorce her. But nowhere in the Old Testament is divorce ever commanded. The Pharisees were blatantly wrong. Misinterpretation of the law concerning marriage and divorce was their first sin.

At the same time there was a hot theological debate going on among the Pharisees over this subject. A rabbi named Hillel taught that a man could divorce his wife for any grievance. Another rabbi, Shammai, said you could only divorce your wife in the case of adultery.

Since Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is the law in question, let's look there and see exactly what Moses said. It may interest you to know that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is the only time Moses give directions about divorce,

“When a man taketh a wife and marrieth her, it shall be if she find no favor in his eyes because he's found some unseemly thing in her . . .”

What does the word unseemly mean? This is what divided the Pharisees between the two camps. Rabbi Hillel said it mean any kind of displeasure and Rabbi Shammai said it meant adultery. But the truth is no one really knows. That's why there was the debate. My opinion is that unseemly will be interpreted later in verse three as the word hate.

“When a man taketh a wife, and marrieth her, it shall be if she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some unseemly thing in her, that he shall write her a letter of divorce, and give it into her hand, and send her out of his house. And she shall depart out of his house, and go away, and may become another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, [this is why I think unseemly means hate] and write her a letter of divorce, and give it into her hand, and send her out of his house; or if the latter husband die who took her as his wife; 4 her first husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for it is an abomination before Jehovah; and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which Jehovah thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.”

Moses stated if a husband for whatever reason hated his wife and no longer wanted to remain married to her he was to write a bill of divorcement. The bill of divorcement was to say certain things. It must list his name, her name, where she had come from, and her father's name. It was to state that they were no longer husband and wife and it was also to include the words that she was free to marry someone else, and then it had to be signed by two witnesses. Divorce was not a private issue, but very public and required two witnesses and their signatures. Once that was done, the husband had to then put it into her hands. There was no divorce without this procedure. At that point she was dismissed and removed from the home. That's the whole of what Moses said.

Before this command in Israel, men were literally throwing their wives out and it was a rampant problem. Men could dismiss their wives at a moment's notice without any explanation. They didn't have to write out a bill of divorce, they simply said, 'You are no longer my wife; I am no longer your husband—now go.' That was it. Therefore Moses instituted a bill of divorce so that a man could not put out his wife in a manner that would leave her defenseless, tempting her to violate the law of God.

As stated earlier, women were considered property. Therefore, an Israelite woman could be sent away from her home without a moment's notice. She would have to leave with the clothes on her back with no physical provision to take care of her. If the husband wanted to, he could send her and their children out. Often he would send the girls and keep the boys. What could a woman do with just the clothes on her back, no money, and no job to feed her and her children? In the eventuality of this happening, women would make jewelry out of coins. They'd make headbands and wrist or ankle bracelets out of coins, so if they were put out they would have temporary provision until maybe they could get on their feet.

Very few women in that day would have had any marketable skills to survive. The only way a woman could survive was by the provision of a man or prostitution, to which many resorted. Of course if she did either she could be stoned. If she moved in with another man and they got married or even if they didn't she could be legally stoned for adultery since the previous marriage was not legally dissolved. The removal from the home was not recognized as a legal divorce. Therefore, the wife who had been told to leave was still legally married. She could move somewhere else where she wasn't known and pass herself off as a widow, but if she were caught she could be stoned. If she got remarried the man could be liable to stoning as well. It was a bad situation to say the least. Putting out or away did not end the marriage.

Moses' command was a solution to the problem. While it didn't fix the initial problem of why a man would put out his wife it did allow the woman some protections. It commanded the dissolution of the marriage so women would not be abused or mistreated. It also provided a cool-down time for the husband. In a rage of anger he could dispel his wife, but with Moses' law of divorce he could not do it in "the heat of the moment." He had to find two witnesses, sit down and write a semi-lengthy bill of divorcement, hopefully by the time he did all of that his anger would have subsided and he would have rethought his actions. The command made it clear it was not a legal divorce to simply put out the wife and tell her you no longer wanted her.

This command also prevented the wife from being put out and feeling forced to become a prostitute or an adulterer. By legally dissolving the marriage by a bill of divorcement she could remarry. Deuteronomy 24:1-2 says, "*Let him write her a letter of divorce, and give it into her hand, and send her out of his house. And she shall depart out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife.*"

She could be another man's wife because the marriage had dissolved. This is a huge fact and must not be overlooked. It tells us death is not the only way a marriage can end. This will be extremely

important when next week we look at Jesus and remarriage.

Perhaps someone is thinking right now, *well it seems to me that the easiest thing Moses could have done instead of commanding a bill of divorce to be written, was just make a command that it's illegal for a man to kick out his wife for any reason.* You would think so. However, if Moses had prohibited putting away wives completely, then the hard heartedness of some men would have made the life of the wife completely unbearable, if not at risk. In fact, a husband could murder his wife and say she had an “accident” and no one else would know. At the very least, it put the wife under an unbearable risk of abuse and at worst, the risk of dying a violent death.

To prove how hard the human heart is, after the command was given and made a part of the Law of God, instead of divorcing their wives, men continued putting their wives out without a bill of divorcement. Why would a man do that? If Moses provided a way a marriage could end and a wife could remarry so she wouldn't be guilty of adultery, why wouldn't a husband be cooperative? The answer is financial.

If a man wrote a bill of divorcement and gave it to his wife he had to repay the dowry in full. The dowry was what the wife's father gave the newlywed couple. It could be as much as one-third of his estate or land, but it was usually a very nice piece of merchandise or sum of money. So the decision to put out a wife without divorcing her was a simple financial decision. If a man divorced his wife, he was responsible to repay the dowry, which sad to say would make her attractive to another potential husband. How would you like to be a husband who can't stand his wife, divorce her and now have to make payments to her or the ex-father-in-law or the new hubby? To avoid that financial hardship many men went ahead and continued putting away their wives without a bill of divorce.

Since the law provided men the ability to have more than one wife, a man could put his wife out and then marry someone else who would be considered a second wife. He could have multiple wives, but his wife couldn't have multiple husbands. That's the historical context of our text.

II. Divorce is Always the Result of Sin

Having examined the cultural view of marriage at the time of the text, let us proceed to deal with what our Lord said concerning divorce. I would say that Jesus made it very plain that never has there been a divorce that was not the result of sin. Jesus shows the Pharisees how Moses should be rightly interpreted. He shows them their first problem was they misunderstood the law's dealing with divorce—God never commanded divorce. He already gave two examples of how they misunderstood the law.

“You've heard it say that you should not murder, but I say unto you . . . You've heard it said that you should not commit adultery, but I say to you . . .”

He's presenting the proper intent of the law and trying to correct what these so-called religious

men had wrongly taught. He's doing the same thing here. In other words, Jesus says, "You've heard it said that this is what God requires for divorce, but I say to you . . ."

Jesus begins verse thirty-one with the word furthermore. This proves He's not finished with the subject of adultery. Furthermore . . . I've got one more thing to say to you . . . In addition to what I've already said. Right here the NKJV is right on. They did a fantastic job with the word furthermore. It links what Jesus says in verse twenty-seven through thirty with this text, but from that moment on the translation goes downhill, as well as most all modern translations. So, what I want to do is to quote mostly today from the Darby Translation. It's an old translation, about the turn of the Twentieth Century and it's a very literal, word-for-word type of translation. Listen to what is actually stated in the Greek.

"It has been said too, Whosoever shall put away his wife . . ."

Modern translations say "whoever divorces his wife." But the accurate Greek rendering is "put away his wife." Why is it important to understand the words are put away with and not divorce? I will explain in a few moments. Jesus continues,

"Let him give her a letter of divorce."

In verse thirty-two Jesus deals with a second problem—casting the wife out without a bill of divorcement.

"But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, except for cause of fornication, makes her commit adultery, and whosoever marries one that is put away commits adultery."

We need to turn to Matthew 19 for help because in that chapter we have an unpacked version of Matthew 5:31-32. Jesus did not explain Himself in the Sermon on the Mount. He merely stated the original intent of the law and reestablished it. Matthew 19 is an expanded version of Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce and it began with a question from the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were out to destroy Jesus' popularity with the people. One way to do this was to prove that Jesus was a heretic, that His teaching was contrary to the Law of Moses. If they could prove this they could remove Jesus and eliminate Him completely. So they asked Him about His position on divorce knowing that His position was no divorce. But they could not publicly humiliate Him on this unless it could be proven in argument that His interpretation of Moses was heterodox. Perhaps they thought if they could not catch Jesus contradicting Moses, then maybe in the least they could force Him to choose sides with one of the two views and alienate the other.

So they ask Him in verse three of Matthew 19,

"And the Pharisees came to Him, tempting Him and saying, 'is it lawful for a woman to put away his wife for every cause?'"

They looked at the letter of the law refusing to understand its intent and stated that Moses commanded a letter of divorce. Pharisees read what Moses wrote and said, "Moses not only sanctioned or permitted divorce, he commanded it. And are you, Jesus, going to tell us it's not lawful for a man to put away his wife for any reason?" That's why they ask Jesus in verse seven,

"Why then did Moses command to give a letter of divorce and to send her away?"

Jesus disputes their interpretation that if a man was displeased with his wife he was under obligation by the law to divorce her. His argument is in verses four through six. Jesus' answer was, yes, Moses permitted divorce but never commanded it. He commanded a certificate of divorce if the divorce was to be legal. Otherwise you were just dismissing your wife. So why then did Moses command a bill of divorce to be written?

Jesus says it was for the issue of their hard-heartedness. Look at verse eight,

"He says to them, 'Moses, in view of your hardheartedness, allowed you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not thus.'"

Jesus' Explanation of Marriage's Original Intent

Jesus says clearly that Moses did not command divorce. God never commanded anybody to be divorced even though He at one time had to divorce somebody Himself. We'll look at that next week. Matthew 19:3,

"Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife and dismiss her?"

Don't read divorce there. It's not what the Bible says. Your translation may say it, but that's not how Matthew recorded it or how Jesus said it.

"Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?"

Jesus answers that question by establishing creation precedence and God's original intent.

*"But He answering said [to them], Have ye not read that He who made [them], from the beginning made them male and female, and said, On account of this a man shall leave father and mother, and shall be united to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh? so that they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."
(Matthew 19:4-6)*

The command is to not separate. Whatever God has put together, don't let a man destroy. Jesus is not contradicting Moses. This cannot be a contradiction of Moses or the law God gave Moses to record. The Lord said in verse seventeen and eighteen of this fifth chapter that He came to

complete the law.

“Don’t think I’ve come to destroy the law but to fulfill the law.” (Matthew 5:17)

He’s not contradicting Moses, but Jesus goes beyond Moses to creation precedence. In the beginning God said one man, one woman, forever.

God never commands divorce no matter the sin.

Divorce is always the result of sin. God never commands divorce no matter the sin. Even when one spouse may have been unfaithful, the Lord does not command divorce. If the couple can’t be reconciled, then the Lord permits it, but it’s still wrong because it doesn’t coincide with God’s original intent. It’s a matter of hard heartedness.

Let’s say a husband is unfaithful. Most read the Bible to say his wife can divorce him and has a right to do so. That is a misinterpretation of the Word of God. Unfortunately, that’s the traditional view of most churches, but that doesn’t make it right. I too held this position that the innocent party has the right to divorce, but is not what Jesus said. A spouse’s infidelity doesn’t justify the other spouse’s right to end the marriage. The reason a spouse who has an unfaithful partner wants a divorce is simply because the cheating spouse refuses his or her infidelity, or because they cannot forgive. When the erring spouse repents and wants to return and the offended spouse refuses it’s because of the hardness of their own heart. A hard heart prevents reconciliation with the cheating spouse. If the spouse wants to be reconciled, and that’s essential, then what’s wrong with your heart that you can’t do with them what God’s done with you—forgive? This is the answer our Lord gives: Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of hearts.

Jesus does not preclude the hard-heartedness of the erring spouse either. It is his or her sin that is destroying the bond of love coveted on the wedding day. Not only this, but because of the hardness of men’s hearts for putting away their wives, God permitted divorce. As stated earlier, although God’s command is to not separate what God has joined together, if divorce were not permitted hard-hearted men would abuse their wives, if not murder them to be free of them.

But the objection comes: *Jesus said that divorce is permissible under the exemption clause of adultery.* But did Jesus really say that? A close and careful reading answers resoundingly that Jesus did not say that.

*“But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, except for cause of fornication, makes her commit adultery, and whosoever marries one that is put away commits adultery.”
(Matthew 5:32)*

Jesus does give an exemption, but it is not for adultery. The exemption is fornication. To interpret fornication as being equal to adultery is not permitted within the historical or grammatical context. Let me give you three arguments why the traditional view is absolutely wrong.

1. Adultery was not a divorceable offense but a capital crime punished by stoning.

You didn't divorce a husband or wife who was unfaithful, you stoned them. The innocent victim is the one who gets to throw the first stone, which was the command of God. Therefore there would be no need for divorce or an adultery exception clause. Now for you theologians, you're thinking they didn't stone for adultery at the time of Jesus. But did that change the law?

In John 8 they bring to Jesus a woman caught in the act of adultery and what does He say? "He that is without sin let him cast the first stone." He upheld the death penalty and at the same time exercised mercy toward the guilty.

2. Jesus does not say for the cause of adultery but fornication.

The word He uses is not the Greek word for adultery but the word *porneia*, from which we get our English word *pornography*. It means fornication. So if you have a translation that says fornication they did well. The use of the word fornication tells us that the Lord cannot be speaking of a legal marriage because it's impossible for a married person to commit fornication. Even lustful thoughts are adultery if you're married. A married person cannot look at pornography and commit fornication; it's adultery. For Jesus to say, "except for the cause of fornication" should tell us we're not dealing with legal marriages, we can't be.

3. Jesus is saying that putting away a wife without a bill of divorcement is not lawful except for one clause. The reason: fornication

What fornication in this verse means is this: if a marriage was considered to be unlawful or invalid according to the law of God, there was no need to write a bill of divorcement. You can't divorce someone who is not your spouse. When two people come under the matrimony of a marriage not sanctioned by the law the remedy was to separate and repent of the sin of fornication. You cannot put away a spouse if they are not truly your spouse.

There are three kinds of relationships in which the Law of God prohibited legal marriage:

One. When the marriage was incestuous. Of course, the Bible forbids this relationship. A marriage between persons too closely related was not a lawful marriage. And since the two people were not legally married the relationship was not an act of adultery but fornication.

Two. When married to pagan women. We see this in Ezra and Nehemiah when some of the priests married pagan Gentile women and Nehemiah plucked out his beard over this incident. He ripped his garment and began to pray. The command of both Ezra and Nehemiah was not to divorce the women but to separate from them and put them away. Why? Because they were not legal marriages.

Three. In Leviticus 20:21 a man was prohibited to marry his brother's wife unless the brother had died. In the case of his brother's death, the surviving brother was to marry the widow if there had been no child born to her and the deceased brother. The surviving brother was to marry his brother's widow and produce a child to carry on the deceased brother's name. But if that brother was alive, even if he divorced his wife, the other brother could not marry her. That was an unlawful marriage and invalid. That's why John the Baptist told King Herod "It's unlawful for you to have your brother's wife." He didn't accuse him of adultery; he said he violated the law of God. In that case you could end the pseudo-marriage without a bill of divorcement because it wasn't valid. This is the exception clause, which means there is no real exception in the case of legitimate marriage. None whatsoever. Divorce is never to take place.

III. God's Marriage Intent

God's design is reconciliation not divorce. Reconciliation. Forgiveness. Isn't that the way He deals with you? We are often guilty of adultery against our Bridegroom but He does not divorce us. The Apostle James comes out and says, "Adulterers and adulteresses." He is talking to Christians. "Don't you know that friendship with the world is enmity with your Lover, your Husband, your God?"

By loving the things of this world you commit adultery. I've been unfaithful to my Bridegroom way too many times and once is too many. But God has not yet divorced me. He pursues me and somehow miraculously, amazingly, gloriously, He reconciles me to Himself. He is that Hosea coming after me, the wild harlot who doesn't know how to love Him. That's God's design. Not divorce, but reconciliation. Divorce is to be avoided because it doesn't fit God's design for marriage.

Look at the disciple's reaction in Matthew 19:10,

"His disciples say to him, if the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry."

Their question implies that if a man marries a woman and she later displeases him or is even guilty of adultery and he can't divorce her, then it would be better for a man never to marry. Marrying the wrong person is dooming yourself to a life of misery. What did Solomon say? "Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, Than in a house shared with a contentious woman" (Proverbs 21:9). So if you can't divorce a displeasing wife for her contentiousness, or even adultery, then wouldn't it be better not to marry? Jesus answered that was true for those given the gift of celibacy.

That's verse thirty-one unpacked. Jesus is correcting this low view of marriage and the idea that divorce is acceptable as well as commanded. It is not commanded but was only permitted to protect innocent victims.

In verse thirty-two Jesus deals with another problem permitted by the religious establishment of

that day. They still tolerated the old practice of putting out the wife without the bill of divorcement. It's still practiced today in Israel among orthodox Jews. A man can put out his wife without giving her a bill of divorcement. In Jewish terms if that happens to a wife, that woman is referred to as "enslaved and in chains." She cannot go and remarry. Jesus addresses this.

"But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, except for cause of fornication, makes her commit adultery, and whosoever marries one that is put away commits adultery."

Jesus prohibits the putting away of spouses without a bill of divorce. He did not say it's okay to divorce. Anyone who walks out of here and says that's what it means is doing the same thing as the Pharisees did. You're giving credence to divorce and Jesus did not do that. But He did teach no divorce without a bill of divorcement. You just can't put out your wife. Jesus said because of the hardness of your heart Moses permitted it. Jesus is coming against this practice of throwing out wives.

Why do some Bible's say, "divorce?" All translations have to do some work of interpretation when taking the Bible from one language to another. We understand that. But older reliable translations translated these verses accurately and put the words *put away* rather than *divorce*. Therefore what has happened is modern translations have succumbed to the evangelical, traditional view of divorce and remarriage instead of translating. They are translating with a bias. They have inaccurately assumed Jesus was meaning divorce because of tradition. Let me give scriptural and grammatical support for translating these two words differently and not as synonyms.

First, putting away and divorce do come from identical Greek words. They are not even related in the Greek language. If you look up the Greek word for putting away, which is *apoluo*, in *Strong's Greek Dictionary*, you will find that near the end of definitions the word divorce is mentioned. But that is only because the KJV in one instance translated *apoluo* that way. The Greek word for *divorce* is *apostasion*. Could it be the King James translators decided to interpret instead of translate? I think so.

Let me give you another example, in Mark 10:4 the KJV says,

"And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away."

The NKJV says almost the same thing,

"They said, 'Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to dismiss her.'"

In this instance, the NKJV translators didn't interpret; they translated. The word is put away or dismiss. Jesus states the act of divorce is two actions, which is what Moses made it. First, a bill of divorcement must be written, and then, and then only, the woman was to be dismissed or put away. Jesus is not saying a husband was to write a bill of divorcement and then divorce her. Not at all. The divorce proceedings included two actions—the bill of divorcement and the sending of the

wife out of the home. Those two actions together constituted a divorce.

Even the Lord God, Himself, makes a distinction between putting away a wife and divorcing a wife. God says in Isaiah 50:1,

“Thus says the Lord, where is the certificate of your mother’s divorce whom I have put away?”

God questions the people of Israel and Judah, proving that He had not yet divorced them. He had put them away because of their adultery, but He had not ended the marriage, thus reserving the right to restore His wife to Himself. “Where is the certificate of your mother’s divorce?” There wasn’t one. It was a rhetorical question. He hadn’t written the bill of divorce yet. He does in later years during the ministry of Jeremiah, but not yet.

“Or which of my creditors is to whom I have sold you?”

The Lord hadn’t sold them. Here’s what He says,

“Your iniquities have sold yourselves and for your transgressions your mother has been put away.”

Not divorced, but put away. There is a difference. Putting away and divorce are two distinct actions. The Law of Moses allowed the divorced party to remarry without being charged with adultery, this was the law of God, which Jesus re-established. If divorce is the correct translation that means Jesus is going against the law of God and forbidding remarriage altogether. But Jesus does not contradict the Law, He fulfilled it. If He were in contradiction to the law the religious leaders would have had Him where they wanted and discredit Jesus before the people. Divorce was allowed and remarriage was allowed, but it was only allowed to protect wives who were victims of their husbands’ hard hearts.

Divorce is the result of sin, no matter the reason. Even if the marriage is in peril because of the spouse’s unfaithfulness, if the offended spouse pursues divorce it’s because of the hardness of his or her heart. Brothers and sisters, I’ve seen marriages restored even when adultery has severed the home. I’ve seen it numerous times. I’m standing here a product of God’s grace working in my wife after I had been unfaithful to her in our earlier years before I was converted. I know what God can do. It’s sad when I hear someone has been unfaithful and Christians run to the innocent party and tell them to divorce. They sound more like the devil than Jesus. Please don’t be guilty of giving that kind of advice.

Jesus is about restoring the fallen, the brokenhearted, and the wounded. He’s not about killing them. God’s grace can do amazing things if both husband and wife are willing to be vessels in which the Lord can work. You say to me, *I don’t care what you say, if my spouse cheats on me then I’m out of here.* All I can say to you is I’m glad God doesn’t treat you that way.

You've cheated on Jesus many times. I've done it and I'm so glad He's not like that. In fact, some of you are cheating on Him right now and it's not hard to see. You've seen a married person dealing with someone of the opposite sex in an inappropriate way and you know what's going on. There are some of you who right now are being unfaithful to your Savior; you're cheating on Him. I'm so glad He's not like you. He is willing to give you another chance and another, and another, and another. He's willing to forgive you right now if you just come back to Him and hate, mourn and confess your sins. Your Husband will take you back. He will not cast you out; He'll receive you with open arms.

Dear friends, I'm telling you my God will forgive you. His grace and mercy outnumbers your sins. If the offending spouse doesn't want reconciliation, yes, you're free, but don't let your heart grow so hard and you refuse to be reconciled. Two wrongs will not make a right.

If you have a spouse that has remained sexually faithful, however, you don't feel like they give you what you believe you need, I want you to hear me: God has permitted this trial for you as an opportunity for you to demonstrate God's grace and love to that unloving spouse. This is not about you. It's about God.

The reason Christian marriages end in divorce is because a spouse began to look to the other and say *you're here for me and you're not doing it for me*. Ladies, there's not a husband in this room that can do it for you. Not a man in this world who can do it for you. Gentlemen, there is not a woman in this world who can do it for you. Only Jesus can. Only Christ.

God is allowing you the ability to show in a small way how God's grace and love works. Will it be easy? Far from it. But you have a choice. You can put your happiness in the hands of another sinner, and keep looking to that spouse and say *you've got to make me happy and if you don't do it, I'm finding somebody else*. And all you will do is put yourself into the hands of another fallen human being. The choice is clear; you can put your happiness in the hands of another flawed human being or in the hands of God.

You can choose to keep covenant with God or you can be unfaithful to your promises. You can choose to keep your word to your spouse and God you made on your wedding day. But you plead with me, they've cheated on me. Well, there was nothing in your vows that said, "I'll love you and take care of you until you die or until you're unfaithful to me," did it? It said "for better or for worse." It doesn't get much worse than adultery, it's bad, but there's no reason for you now to be unfaithful to your word and covenant. You can choose to let God work in you. It is very possible that He will work in you and your mate in remarkable ways. You have a choice to be a part of God's redemptive work. The choice is up to you. You can come and be a partner with Christ who was an innocent sufferer of the sins of someone else—you. Or you can choose to condemn and not forgive. You can work revenge rather than redemption. I pray you choose redemption over revenge.

Oh, God, help us to be co-laborers with Christ in suffering, even though it means suffering by the hands of a spouse. God will help you. He will be faithful even when your spouse isn't. Amen.