Disciples Church

Marriage & Singleness Series - Session 5 -

Q29. What is Marriage?-Part 4: Until Death Do Us Part

Week of January 31, 2018

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q29. What is marriage?**

Marriage is a covenant relationship whereby God joins together one man and one woman into a one-flesh union designed to be faithful and last until the couple is separated by death.

* **As we begin…**

Welcome back. Last time we discussed hermeneutics and many passages. Tonight we continue that as we look at some interesting passages.

So let’s jump in. We turn now to the last remaining passages from the Gospels to look at, these are in Matthew’s Gospel.

Within Matthew’s Gospel comes the few verses that most people not taking our position, use to allow for divorce in at least one situation. And this is unfortunate.

By doing this, (using Matthew’s Gospel as permission for divorce) they are unaware of or denying all the hermeneutical points we made earlier and the consistent point of Scripture that God’s will is that marriage only end by death and that should be upheld.

Their main error is that they take Matthew’s Gospel account of this topic and use a *surface reading* of the passages to **control** how they interpret all the other passages we’ve seen tonight.

Now, don’t be mistaken, quantity of passages when trying to understand teaching is not the decisive thing to control our hermeneutic; I am not saying it’s one Gospel book (Matthew’s) against many other books in the canon, so let’s just go with the many. Remember **the Bible does not contradict itself**. All of Scripture on any topic, must be pointing to the same truth.

Instead I am saying, they people who don’t hold to the Permanence View wrongly **lift up** Matthew’s verses on this topic and use their surface reading of the passages to control how they understand all the others. And that is the problem…it’s a problem because of everything else we’ve seen in these lessons. We cannot be unaware of the hermeneutics and verses we considered, nor reject them if we are aware. Doing so it not “rightly handling the word of truth.”

So instead of doing that, which is very popular, we use careful considerations to get to the reasons and point that God was making through Matthew’s writings on this.

Let’s look at the passages now.

Since we walked though this same dialog (same narrative exchange) in Mark last week we won’t repeat ourselves fully. But know that this passage is in fact the same exchange that Mark’s Gospel had in chapter 10.

**Matthew 19:1-12** **1**Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. **2**And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

**3**And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?” **4**He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, **5**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’?**6**So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

PAUSE there. In this account from Matthew, notice that the order of the conversation is different. We don’t have time to go into why that happens at times in the four Gospels. But from *this perspective* let’s pause and see something very clear:

The Pharisees asked Jesus, “Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for ANY cause?” and Christ answered an unwavering, totally clear, no questions asked “NO.”

And……….ONCE AGAIN……….what does he give as the basis for this unwavering NO? The Creation Ordinance reality. ”What…God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Asked and answered.

But the Pharisees don’t like the answer (as we know from before) so they push Him:

**7**They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” **8**[Jesus] said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

So, in the same fashion, but in a different order, they object with a wrong understanding of Moses’ Deuteronomy 24 passage, and Jesus tells them that what they are trying to hold claim to does not trump the Creation passages. Very clear, we covered that and saw this last week.

As we continue in the exchange we come to the more difficult portion for people to understand rightly. In the next verse Jesus continues and says:

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

Ok, hang on. “Except for sexual immorality” are words we haven’t seen yet.

Remember the question we were asking last week?… is there *ANY appearance* in the this passage for permission to initiate or long for a divorce, or to remarry after divorce if a former spouse is living?

Based on a very simple or surface reading *it does appear* here that Jesus may be giving a permission to divorce or remarry.

…But, we’ve got tools to help us know that this in fact is not a permission to divorce or remarry after divorce if a former spouse is still living. Why? Well, as we’ve said, these are important things that need more than a surface handling of the text.

We need to be diligent to rightly understand if and why this does or does not control how we read all the non-Matthew passages.

Before I share what this passage is speaking to, let’s consider more hermeneutics and an example.

We’ve said there are many topics in Scripture that seem unclear or even contradictory upon a simple or quick or uniformed reading of various passages.

We have talked about this many times in our MidWeek lessons and sermons.

There are single words that have more than five meanings in Scripture,

there are verses that seems to imply that God does a type of thing while other verses say he cannot do such a thing,

and there are commands at one point of Scripture that are different than commands at other parts of Scripture,

and so on…..there are many topics in Scripture that seem unclear or even contradictory.

While things can certainly be **un**clear to us, in our flesh, there is nothing in Scripture that contradicts itself. When we get to an apparent contradiction we must realize the issue is not with God’s word, but with our perception that it contradicts—our understanding of it. Instead of a matter being a contradiction, it comes down to us needing a more informed understanding to make sense of the matter.

Let me give you a powerful example of the importance of proper hermeneutics…

Some, but not all, of Scripture can be taken at a surface or uniformed reading.

But in other cases, if a person takes a verse or passage and uses it **without the whole counsel of God** (all of Scripture—Tota Scriptura) **rightly informing their interpretation of the verse**, then there is a real possibly of wrong, harmful, or even damning conclusions.

Consider this example.

If a person (as many do in false religions) takes a verse from the second chapter of James’s letter and tries to argue with only a surface reading of it, it would appear to be a very serious rebuttal to the core of the Christian gospel. Look at:

**James 2:24 (ESV)**

**24**You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

A “person is justified by works and not by faith alone”??? Whoa, wait a minute. If that is true (as a simple, plain, surface reading would conclude with no regard for it’s context or the rest of Scripture) than the Christian gospel as we know it is completely false and we are all fools for believing we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

I mean look, it says plainly “a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”

So how do we know that the most important question of: how is one saved—justified— is not answered by a simple reading of this James 2:24 passage? *Because the rest of Scripture informs us how a person is saved/justified and also informs us how to understand what James is saying in the flow of thought where this verse appears*.

The actual points James is actually making in this section of chapter 2 are real and true and good, but to build a position about something from one or a few verses that seem to go against the rest of what Scripture, rightly understood, says on the topic is not the right way to honor God nor His word.

That is critical, so let me say it again; to build a position about something from one or a few verses that seem to go against the rest of what Scripture, rightly understood, says on the topic is not the right way to honor God nor His word.

Quickly, in case you’re on tilt about the James 2:24 verse. James’ main point in this section of chapter 2 is that true saving faith in Jesus will always be followed by good works. While we are still imperfect, real believers increasingly hate sin, repent when they sin, and do good works—all by God’s power. True saving faith is a faith that leads to good works. That is James’ point (and the teaching of the rest of Scripture rightly understood). These good works we do, do not add to or maintain our right standing with God, let us be clear on that, but they do exist as good fruit of true salvation.

Unfortunately, many people wrongly use this James 2 verse and therefore misunderstand James and God’s revealed truth and will.

So that is our example to lift up the point within hermeneutics that to build a position about something from one or a few verses that seem to go against the rest of what Scripture, rightly understood, says on the topic is not the right way to honor God or His word.

Instead of that, we must let the whole Bible, rightly understood, be our basis for interpreting all matters, including of course less clear passages.

And so it is with Matthew’s Gospel in regards to divorce and remarriage. We cannot take the plain or surface reading and have it control the rest of Scripture, and this is because of all else that we have seen on the topic.

So what does it mean?

What does Matthew 19: **9**And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery,” and the one other place this comes up in Matthew’s Gospel, **Matthew 5:31-32** mean?

((**31**“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ **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))

Well, first let’s be clear about the words being used in these passages. The Greek word many modern translations use there for “divorces” in “whoever divorces his wife” is more commonly a general word for separation or putting away.

I bring this up so that you understand that you read the word “divorce” (which has a very narrow and specific meaning in our minds) but the word wasn’t and isn’t **actually** that narrow.

You see it more technically (accurately) translated in older translations, such as:

KJV “Whosoever *shall put away* his wife”

YLT “whoever *may put away* his wife”

We also see the Greek word does not narrowly mean divorce (as we think of it) in that it’s used many times elsewhere meaning something definitively different than marital divorce. For example:

**Matthew 14:22** **22**Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he **dismissed** the crowds.

“Dismissed” there is the same Greek word in Matthew 19 translated divorce.

And consider

**Mark 15:11** **11**But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him **release** for them Barabbas instead.

“Release” there is the same Greek word in Matthew 19 translated divorce.

In fact, the various forms of this Greek word are used more than 60 times in the NT, and it is only translated “divorce” in newer translations *in the marriage passage discussions*. It’s most commonly translated elsewhere release, separate, etc. Therefore, the modern translators are doing us a disservice by assigned the narrow translation to the Greek word in these cases.

The reason for this clarity is not to say the word and idea doesn’t also include divorce as we know it, but it is to say that if your reading causes you to be in conflict to teaching in Scripture, you must do a deeper work than a surface reading of the modern English translation.

This point is important because, I believe translating it “divorce” does readers a disservice in that it does not likely communicate to the reader **anything but** the narrow idea of “divorce” as *we know it*. And, yet, other types of separation are in play. Such as a separation of betrothed persons (formally committed, but not yet a one-flesh union) and the putting off/putting away a spouse by the cause of capital punishment for something the law required.

You’ll see why this is important as we continue, so let’s move on…

Our looming question is what does this “except for sexual immorality” in Matthew’s Gospel mean?

Various good theologians (such as Voddie Baucham and John Piper) agree with the Permanence View and give explanations as to what Matthew’s Gospel is saying by “except for sexual immorality” and “except on the ground of sexual immorality” to help you see that it is not a permission for the type of divorce we are most familiar with.

But in an addition to what they share, we think there is a clear and helpful answer to the question to raise up, so we’ll go another route in this lesson.

Now, as we said before, you need to remember who the first audience of a writing is.

Knowing that often gives you interpretation help.

In this case the first audience of Matthew’s Gospel is Jews. That means they have history and understanding that the gentiles don’t have.

And because of that, Matthew’s Gospel contains so much writing that would have been easily understandable for the Jewish readers, but not necessarily the gentile readers without further calcification.

Turn to Matthew 1. What is there? A long list of names you know (or knew) very little about since it’s not your family line—not your ethnic history. As someone not in the Old Covenant, what significance did the genealogy have to you before you were taught how significant it is and why it’s in Matthew’s Gospel? None. There is a reason it’s in Matthew’s Gospel the way it is and not Mark’s Gospel….and that is because the Jews knew the promises made during the Old Convent for the Messiah to come through a certain people. It automatically has **huge** implications and meaning to the Jewish audience… implications and meaning it doesn’t have to us gentiles, until we are taught why and understand its reason for being in Matthew’s Gospel like it is.

And that is the case with these “except for sexual immorality” statements.

Let me explain.

At the time of this exchange between the Pharisees and Jesus, the Old Covenant was still in play. The Jews were bound by it and they knew its laws.

Especially in Matthew’s Gospel (since it’s the Gospel to the Jews), we see Jesus uphold the Old Covenant. For example:

**Matthew 8:1-5**

**1**When [Jesus] came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him.**2**And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” **3**And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. **4**And Jesus said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”

“offer the gift that Moses commanded” The Old Covenant was still in play and Jesus upheld it in his life during the Old Covenant.

Now, listen closely…

Who was primarily in the Old Covenant? *Israelites. Jews.*

What have we seen in Scripture is the God ordained, actual way for the one-flesh marriage union to end? *Death.*

What did the Old Covenant require for those caught in sexual immorality? What was the response for that sin?

It was clear to the Jews in the Old Covenant, God was clear in what was to be done to sexually immoral people, Leviticus 20 speaks to it, and so does:

**Deuteronomy 22:22** **22**“If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel.

See, in the Old Covenant, if a spouse or betrothed person was sexually immoral, God provided a means to end the marriage that was not simply *divorce* ….no, the marriage would be brought to an end by the punishment of death for any persons guilty of sexual sins.

So then, when the Jewish audience reads in Matthew’s Gospel “whoever divorces his wife, **except for sexual immorality**, and marries another, commits adultery,” or the like in chapter 5, what would they think of?

They would realize that Jesus is reminding the Jews that sexual immorality means death in the covenant they were in.

They would hear this as “whoever ends his marriage (remember, the word is broader than how we hear *divorce*) with his wife, except for in the case of sexual immorality in which the wife would be put to death thereby ending the marriage per God’s terms, and marries another, commits adultery.” Or Chapter 5 “everyone who ends his marriage with his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality in which the wife would be put to death thereby ending the marriage per God’s terms, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman who was not put to death commits adultery”

See our, New Covenant, 21st Century, gentile minds, don’t think about what the Old Covenant set forth as the punishment for those caught in sexual immorality. But with right things in mind, the right hermeneutics, we can understand how the **first audience** would have heard these “except for sexual immorality” statements.

To the Jewish audience, these words (that don’t appear anywhere else in inspired Scripture), are, in this view, a clarity to the Jews that actually reinforces and holds up Christ’s and the rest of Scripture’s teaching that only death ends the one-flesh marriage union.

So, based primarily on all that we have seen in this study and because of an informed reading of Matthew’s Gospel, we believe that the “except for sexual immorality” is not a permission to *divorce*, and therefore one cannot take the plain or surface reading of it and have it control the rest of Scripture.

But look at this, we’re not the only ones that take Jesus’s words in Matthew 19 to mean:

1) The one-flesh union created in marriage is permanent until the death of one of the spouses.

2) Initiating or longing for a divorce is never lawful.

3) Remarrying after divorce is an act of adultery if a former spouse is living.

We need go no further than to hear the thoughts of the disciples who were with Jesus and spoke up in an effort to digest what they heard. Look, the very next verses in Matthew 19:

**10**The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”

They are saying, “WHOA, if a person is not permitted by God to end the one-flesh union via divorce than it’s better to not even marry!”

And look, Jesus doesn’t say, “Oh, no, wait if things get really hard, or they cheat, or they are hurtful, you can divorce,” instead He says:

**11**But he said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. **12**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.”

*Eunuchs*, simply stated, are those who live in a single state. Singles-Unmarried people.

He doesn’t soften His marriage teaching since it sounds hard to some to uphold, He holds it up and says, those who can’t or aren’t willing to agree to God’s design for marriage either know they gift of Singleness from God or should realize they have that gift of singleness. For it it’s better to be single than to disobey God’s design for marriage.

So that’s Matthew’s Gospel. Let’s look at one more passage, the other passage that those who hold to the Two Clause view use to justify initiating a divorce or remarrying after divorce…back to a chapter in 1 Corinthians 7.

We read verses 10 and 11 previously, but let’s read them again for the flow of thought:

**1 Corinthians 7:10-16 10**To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband **11**(but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

Now Paul transitions a bit to address a specific situation within this train of thought:

**12**To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) [[Remember, Paul is an Apostle inspired by the Holy Spirit, what He says here means Jesus had not specifically given the command in his ministry prior. Here is the command:]] that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. **13**If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.

Pause, we see clearly here Paul lifting up and giving this command on the heels of the permanence teaching he just finished in the prior verses, remember that, we cannot rip these next verses away from that context nor the greater teaching of Scripture we have seen.

So he affirms our first two points of the Permanence View:

The one-flesh union created in marriage is permanent until death.

Paul says clearly “If any married Christian has a spouse who is an unbeliever, and the unbelieving spouse consents to live with you believer, you cannot divorce them.” Why? Because initiating or longing for a divorce is never lawful.

Ok, well this is a broken world, as we have discussed, so what if an unbelieving spouse is not willing to live with his or her believing spouse? What if the unbeliever separates himself from the marriage? Paul answers that in verse 15: **15**But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.

“Let it be so,” Paul says. This means that a Christian cannot and should not force the hand of an unbelieving spouse who is insistent on leaving/divorcing. Paul is comforting believers in this situation to know that you are called to a ministry of peace, and that means you do what you can to lovingly fight for the marriage, **but you are not sovereign over the unbelieving spouse, so you cannot control them**. You are not in sin, if you are abandoned or divorced by an unbeliever causing it.

Additionally, the believer “is not enslaved” is speaking to the kind of effort one must take to keep the believing spouse with you. If you were enslaved, it would become your everything, it would own you day and night, it would be your full-time effort to force yourself on them. But since the believer “is not enslaved,” Paul can give the instruction that it would be permissible to agree to a separation/divorce forced by the unbeliever.

The Permanence view saying, “**Initiating** or longing for a divorce is never lawful” is very specific. See that? A person is never honoring God by initiating or longing for a divorce. But God through Paul, does say, you can have a clear conscience if an unbelieving spouse forces a divorce on you that you don’t long for.

*But don’t take this farther than Paul does here*. The rest of what we have seen is still true, namely, The one-flesh union created in marriage is permanent until death. And Remarrying after divorce is an act of adultery if a former spouse is living.

Just because you may allow a divorce forced on you—you are not enslaved to forcing them to stay— that does not mean it trumps God’s Creation Ordinance reality for marriage. The one-flesh union created in marriage is still permanent until death. That doesn’t change. And therefore, what a person does after a divorce, no matter the reason for the divorce, doesn’t change. Remarrying after divorce is an act of adultery if a former spouse is living.

While in human considerations the marriage is ended in divorce, in God’s consideration, which is the ultimate, the one-flesh union created in marriage is still intact, until the death of one of the spouses, and it must be honored as such.

Simply stated: This means a new marriage is not permitted by God. Practically, it also means that you live in such a way that honors the standing one-flesh union in every way on your end, until you or that spouse dies. That means pursuing sexual interactions of any kind, dating others, or longing for new relations with anyone, would be a dishonoring in mind, deed, or heart of God’s call on you to honor the one-flesh union He created.

While, because of sin in this world, you cannot have the marriage with the first spouse you had hoped for (at least so far as you can tell), nor can you seek a new romantic relationship, **you can** give a beautiful testimony of the Lordship of Christ in your life and have the opportunity to speak the gospel using this situation. What do we mean by this? What opportunity?

Well, since what Paul said in Ephesians 5 is true, all of us who are married, or previously married, can and must use that to fulfil God’s design. Remember:

**Ephesians 5:31-32** 31“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32This mystery is profound, and *I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

God through Paul teaches that *human marriage is designed by God to display the unbreakable union that Jesus has with the redeemed ones*.

So how does this relate to someone who has been divorced or may be left by an unbelieving spouse in the future? This person must “hold fast” to their commitment they made so that in doing so it points to the gospel reality that Jesus will never leave His redeemed ones!

There is so much opportunity in that to glorify God.

First, in doing this a person can show that Jesus is their highest treasure….not the temporary. An unmarried person gets to live out the reality that it is not one’s spouse that fulfills them or should be their cause of ultimate joy. No, it it’s Christ Jesus who is these things for us and by living unmarried there is a unique opportunity to live that out and share that.

Second, when someone asks about the situation (for example why you are not seeking another spouse after a divorce) there is now an incredible opportunity to share the gospel. Something like, “*It is sad that, due to sin, my marriage did not turn out as I had hoped, but I have all I need in Jesus, so I can honor God’s design for me to be faithful to the marriage covenant I did make and the one-flesh union that God created between us. In fact, the Bible tells us that our human marriage, and the commitment to it until death, is a parable of How Christ will not forsake those He is united with. So, by me staying faithful to the marriage covenant I made, I get to put this on display. Even if my spouse was unfaithful, or continues to be unfaithful to the marriage covenant we made, including even getting married to someone else, in my continuing to honor the marriage covenant I made, I show Jesus’s commitment to His people even when they sin after being united to Him. See, Jesus doesn’t stay faithful to us based on our performance. Our sin cannot and does not separate us from Jesus, likewise, our marriages, no matter how riddled with sin and difficulty they are, should reflect Christ’s forgiveness and faithfulness.*”

Don’t waste your situation. Use it as a means to glorify God and proclaim the gospel!

Be sure of something: living life without a spouse **is not second rate**. If you are thinking to yourself, well you’re married, and your marriage seems to be going fine, so it’s easy for you to hold this position and say these things. Then first you need to realize that it’s not about the messenger—your pastors’ situations don’t and can’t dictate what we teach—and second, more importantly, Jesus did do life without a spouse, and confidently, we do not call that second rate. **Marriage is not the treasure, having Christ is.** Being unmarried (single) is a gift from God, and should be intentionally used for His glory. We are excited to lift up and teach on the honor of Singleness in our next lesson of this series. So stay tuned. But in the meantime, fill your mind and heart with the reality that being unmarried is not a curse, it is not second rate, it is not something to forsake.

Now, this serves as a good segue. While there are other passages we could look at and teaching we can do on this topic, we need to use remaining time to

help you understand how your leaders will see through and minister in these realties,

help you know what we expect of you,

and answer some other common questions.

So, let’s begin with some common questions that come up in these topics. Know that we cannot hit on every question in our time here, so if there is a pressing matter that needs an answer for your life or ministry, please email the elders and we’ll get back to you at our first opportunity.

First question to cover:

Q: Are you—or the Permanence View the leaders hold—advocating that an abused husband or wife should take the abuse since they cannot get divorced?

A: This is a very important question and clarity. Plainly, let us say that our Permanence View of marriage **does not mean a spouse should accept or tolerate any kind of abuse**. Period. We will not tolerate or stand by when abuse is happening.

Now, how a person handles it needs to be biblically informed. So let’s do that briefly.

First, realize that the traditional two-clause position on divorce and remarriage, does not permit divorce for abuse. It is only positions that allow for someone to go beyond Scripture to conclude that it is okay to divorce due to abuse. You must see that. In none of the passages in Scripture that we looked at or otherwise, is divorce as we know it permitted for abuse. Both the Permanence View and Two-Clause View, acknowledge that.

That said, what does a person do? Well, the answer is more simple than it may first seem. If some kind of abuse happens, Scripture would put that squarely in the category of *sin that needs to be exposed*, and hopefully repented of.

Exposing it is the step an abused spouse should take. For believers this often happens by including church leaders for accountability, support, and to create a safe haven for the abused spouse.

So that’s what it looks like, say for example, if a spouse is physically abused, the clear counsel we are giving is **get out of the physical situation (leave the area), get help, proceed seeking biblical results**.

In many cases, abuse will justly require law enforcement to be called and if a spouse is found guilty of abuse they will be put in jail. Understand that Christian grace and forgiveness doesn’t mean we encourage or give room for people to practice sin. We hold them accountable. Someone married to an abuser might end up in a season or lifetime of physical separation to protect oneself and hold accountable the person practicing sin but it is not grounds to break what God has joined through divorce.

This leads us to a second related question.

Q: If a spouse is put in jail, especially for a long time, may divorce and remarriage happen for the non-jailed spouse?

A: No. Just like in the unbelieving spouse divorcing a spouse situation, the requirement from God would be to honor the one-flesh reality, honor the marriage covenant, and remain faithful in all ways to the incarcerated spouse, telling the world the same gospel good news about Jesus’ faithfulness to His redeemed even in their sin.

If your adult child commits a heinous crime and goes to jail for 30 years, does this consequence change the fact that he/she is your child? No.

Same with a spouse. It changes the day-to-day dynamics of the relationship immensely, but it doesn’t mean you divorce them and move on. Only death ends the one-flesh relationship.

Q: What if I was divorced before I knew what Scripture says about it or before I was saved even, can I have a new opportunity to get married?

A: Since the one-flesh union exists despite one’s knowledge of how it works, or the person’s spiritual state, there are no exceptions to God’s unchanging design for these things.

In the same way, no person looks at a marriage between unsaved people or even a marriage of one saved person and one not and declares them to not actually have a real marriage. No, any marriage between one man and one woman is a real marriage in which God has joined them together into a one-flesh union that is permanent until death.

Additionally, not knowing every detail of God’s design or law does not give someone rights to not honor it. That’s the case in this topic or any other topic.

Again, there is real opportunity to live for God’s glory over our own temporary desires and proclaim the gospel in these situations.

Q: If I am already in a subsequent marriage (or I married someone previously divorced even though it’s my first marriage) how should I think, feel, and act now that I know God’s design for marriage?

A: The most recent marriage that you have committed to is the one that you need to honor in the here and now. A marriage in these cases is not second rate or invalid. Subsequent marriages are REAL marriages. A new one-flesh union has been created and it needs to be honored until death. We see Jesus consider one woman’s subsequent marriages as real marriages in **John 4:16-19** **16**Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” **17**The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; **18**for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” **19**The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.

This woman was married FIVE times, and Jesus acknowledges all of them as marriages, saying she has had five husbands.

So, your marriage is real and should be honored until death of one of the spouses.

Additionally, it is important that you agree with the Scripture we saw in these lessons, and rightfully say that the act of getting married was a sin (adultery), confess it as such and repent of that act of disobedience, and then honor that real marriage you are in….living each day with your spouse for God’s glory. You are forgiven in Christ of the act of sin in getting married and you are sanctified day by day by our gracious God in your marriage.

If anyone divorced is hearing this and thinks, well, I really want to get married so I’ll just commit the sin, confess it, and then have my spouse. Let me tell you that intentional, preconceived sin is a VERY serious thing that we must warn you not to do. Jesus doesn’t delight in us seeking our will over His. He says, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." (John 14:15) Do you love and live for Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life? Then it shall be your joy to keep His commandments.

There are many, many other questions that come up, and we can answer them as needed.

Let me say again, both the Permanence View and Two-Clause View share many layers of application. Except for the two very specific exceptions of adultery and abandonment, these two views agree on all the other points, i.e. abuse, incarceration, vegetative disease, etc.

Now, you may be wondering how the leaders at this church plan to implement and, if needed, see through church discipline on these things.

First, let me say, you know us very well. We do not take God’s word lightly, and we do not seek to placate to popular opinion or man’s preferences. I want to say that because in a less typical fashion, we do plan to have some leeway at some points in all of this. You may be wondering, why. Why have some leeway on this topic in certain ways?

The reason is, we have done our best effort to study and discern this topic and all the technicalities that may come up, and in the end we do land in a position that is different than some theologians we really respect. Frankly, this topic is highly debated. There are GREAT, GREAT theologians in both camps, Permanence View and Two-Clause View. Now, offten times people try to paint *any topic like that*; God’s sovereignty, salvation, etc…people often try to say, “well there are people on both sides, theologians on both sides, so I’m okay just picking the one I like better, or not taking a side at all.” Well, that’s not fully accurate. Yes there are people opposing truth all through history, so in that way, people on two sides. But many core and important truths of Scripture have a time-tested clarity and validation by theologians that can’t be ignored.

But this this topic, what makes this unique, is that there are GREAT theologians on both sides, there are GREAT theologians wrestling with this through all of church history, there are real points of tension. And because of that we want to honor that reality by not being too strict in how we apply some of these things.

Please hear me carefully and clearly. After many years of study and prayer and digging into all the sides and hermeneutics and giving careful consideration each of your elders have come to a united conviction that God’s word teaches the Permanence View.

Therefore we (the elders) must personally act according to this conviction and not give into our fleshly desires.

You don’t ever want your called and commissioned by God pastors to set aside what we believe Scripture teaches in order to teach or practice what our flesh desires more, or what seems like an easier path. This is the worst thing we could ever do.

This is not easy for us as there are many times when our flesh wants to give way to what “feels” right. Pray for us, that we hold fast to what God has given us and remain faithful to Him in leading you accordingly.

What this means is we must teach what we believe God’s word teaches and we must live out in our personal lives what we believe God’s word teaches….this means we will not counsel people to initiate or long for a divorce and we will not perform or attend new marriages when a previous spouse is living.

Our understanding of Scripture, and therefore our conscience, dictate Permanence View for ourselves. So we will not encourage anyone to initiate or long for a divorce, we will not officiate a wedding of any persons not eligible be married, and we will not attend a wedding of any persons not eligible be married.

This does not mean we do not see the divorce as a reality, or the remarriage as true marriage once it happens. It just means we cannot officiate the process to make it happen, nor celebrate it.

If our conviction is that marrying another after a divorce, for example, is, as Jesus said, an act of adultery, we cannot and will not officiate it or celebrate it.

Once the marriage is a reality, we will honor it as a marriage and love the couple as we would any other couple. Welcoming them, counseling them, ministering to them, etc. No one will be treated second rate.

What this also means is that every table group leader, disciple-maker, etc (anyone influencing others in our body here) must teach, minister, and counsel from the Permanence View. If these leaders do not agree with every point of the Permanence View, we want to take the time to work through that with them, so in the end and all the while, all in leadership positions are unified in upholding this view. Why? Beside that we’ve all agreed to **not** create division against elder’s teaching in our membership covenant and bylaws. The simple fact is—the reason that exists in our documents is— we’re not loving the body well to have leaders with *conflicting* messages. We don’t love people well by discipling them one direction then for them to talk with an elder and be told otherwise, or vice versa. **We must have unity in how we teach and minister.** We must, as Scripture says, be of the SAME MIND. Since God commissions the elders to lead the church it will be lead according to said positions of the elders.

So, that’s one element of how we will live out this topic. With all that said, we do understand there are many whom we highly respect who do hold to the Two Clause view, and because of the weight of debate on this topic, we have agreed to not hold our members to have to practice the conviction of Permanence **if** they hold to the Two Clause view based on a robust understanding from Scripture. If after they have joyfully sought out our understanding of what the Scriptures teach, and they still feel convinced biblically to practice the Two Clause view then, while we will not perform or endorse the divorce or new marriage, but we will also not stand against it….meaning we will not exercise church discipline, we will not separate from you.

In cases where people here enter into new marriages, we will honor the one flesh union once made and we will not treat that marriage as second rate.

To say it another way, while it is our hope that each of you have been convinced by Scripture of the Permanence View, we will not do church discipline when people do things that the Two Clause View permits when they are acting in accordance with a biblically informed conviction that the Two Clause view is the correct view AND are not standing on that view as a way to sinfully neglect any effort to forgive and reconcile with their spouse. We will expect our people to seek council from the elders regardless of their position.

This means for example, all those things worked out rightly, if someone’s spouse commits adultery and they choose to divorce them, we will not do church discipline with that party who hadn’t committed adultery.

Nor would we do church discipline for persons who choose to get married to someone else while their first spouse is still living if the persons were divorced due to adultery or divorce initiated by an unbeliever.

In all our prayer and burden of working through this topic and how to shepherd through it, we believe it’s wise at this time to land here in some application. This is not an endorsement of any kind to the Two Clause View, rather it is our humble desire to not overstep with discipline if the GREAT Two Clause theologians are somehow right, and it’s our humble desire to keep unity with those who disagree with us but carefully hold to the Two Clause View. We will do church discipline in cases where people move beyond the traditional Two Clause View in their actions.

Look, while that’s all true, in how we live this out and allow for some concessions, **you have a responsibility to be honest about Scripture**. Each of us will have to give an account for how we believe and live out Scripture. You cannot claim the Two Clause View simply because it may serve you or others better at some point in your life. **If you claim it you need to be able to give a biblical explanation of why**. We set forth a very thorough and detailed teaching on these things in these lessons in order to help you see what God’s word teaches. We hope you are trusting your pastors, and seeing the consistent teaching of Scripture on all of this.

As we close we want to remind you of one of the hermeneutic points we had:

It was that we must: Honor God’s expressed will as our highest desire.

One of the things we mean under this banner is that it should be our desire to honor what God has expressed rather than searching for loopholes or over desiring exemptions that better fit our temporary circumstances.

See, our brothers and sisters who hold the Two-Clause View will often rightly acknowledge that God’s will and design for marriage is to last until the couple is separated by death, but then say, BUT if needed a person can divorce/remarry for these two reasons.

However, we want for us and you all, to be a people that say…”*What is it that God wants? That is what I will do. While I have fleshy desires, my life in this first creation is like a mist in light of eternity. Since I get God for eternity, I want to honor His will and design here and now.*”

We don’t want to search for loopholes or over desire exemptions that better fit our temporary circumstances. We want God and His will above it all.

Let’s wrap up now, and do this by reminding you what we said in the beginning:

We want you to know there is pastoral sensitivity to the effects of divorce. Please know your pastors are here to walk with you, love you, and help you with current marriage struggles or past hurts stemming from divorce. And we will do this based on His word.

God is good, this topic can be hard, and we are committed to walk with you through it. Please feel free to reach out with any additional questions you may have. As part of our answer to those questions we may have a great resource for you to use in working this through. Or if you don’t have questions but would like more resources on the Permanence View for your personal library, we have some recommendations.

Let’s pray…