Section: Doctrine of Man (Anthropology)

**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.

*L27 - Q29 Part 3 - Until Death Do Us Part*

* **Even in the Common Vow**

Tonight, we consider God’s design of the nature of the union *and how long the union lasts*, which is often committed to in a common vow like this:

"I, husband, take you, wife, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, ***until death do us part***."

We’ve titled this lesson “Until Death Do Us Part.”

Now, before we dive into the text we (myself and the other pastors here) want to start with a few points.

First, we want to start by acknowledging that divorce’s impact has been far-reaching. To some degree or another all of us in the room have been affected by divorce. Whether it’s being raised in a broken home, having loved friends go through it, or having your own marriage turn into divorce…it has affected us all.

It’s with a sad heart that we even have to know the thing called *divorce*. In a world without sin there would be nothing known like *divorce*.

We want you to know there is pastoral sensitivity to the effects of divorce. Please know your pastors and group leaders 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 that according to what God’s expressed will is based on His word.

Next, in addition to that, we want you to be reminded that it is the word of God *rightly studied* that rules your pastors………not a consensus of other churches,

not popular opinion,

and not even our own flesh/desires.

We must stay true to God’s word in our teaching. We hope you see that commitment tonight.

The last introductory point is, during this lesson, if you are hearing the teaching and understanding it to mean you or someone you loved has participated in marriage, divorce, or remarriage in a way the Scripture does not permit, please remain patient to let the teaching finish and lets take time to consider how we should feel and act in regard to the truth that God reveals in His word. We must have a proper understanding, BEFORE we begin to draw application or emotional responses.

Your pastors, and your table leaders, are able to help you apply the truth learned, once it has been understood correctly.

We will help you understand how to honor whatever situation you find yourself in now and walk it out with you.

But, to honor God rightly, we must **first** understand…**then** apply.

* **The Core Pillars about Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage Found in Scripture**

Now, **The core pillars about marriage, divorce, and remarriage as found in Scripture are as follows…**

The Bible teaches that:

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.

You will see tonight that an informed understanding of God’s word teaches these three pillars.

* **The Scripture**

So, let’s **work through passages from Scripture related to our topic.**

* **Marriage is a Creation Ordinance**

We will begin by starting with the origin of marriage which happens at the beginning of God’s written revelation. Here we review a point made in an earlier lesson of this series,

this point is that **Marriage is a Creation Ordinance**. We see, for example, in

**Genesis 2:24** **24**Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

You will see just how important this is throughout the night.

After creating man and woman, God brought them together. He performed the first human marriage union *and He communicated His design for human marriage—as a creation ordinance*.

As we taught before, it’s critical to know that *Creation Ordinances* are perpetual in this creation. That means the ordinance/reality/law that God brought forth in the Creation Ordinance remains in this creation.

So, if God declared that a married couple must “hold fast” to each other because they have “become one flesh” in a unique marital way, then that never changes in this first creation.

Realities in Creation Ordinances may or may not change *after* life in this first creation. And in the case of marriage Scripture tells us that **it does change** in the resurrection. Human marriage goes away after life in this first creation, you have **Matthew 20:30** in your notes there.

In this creation though, in the here and now we live, *the will of God for those who have committed to marriage is to “hold fast” to our spouse*, as our text says.

We will see further in our study that *death* is the only thing that ends the one-flesh union. And we’ll continue to see the importance of the creation ordinance one-flesh union as we work through Scripture in this lesson.

In fact, we find an important answer to why God determined to make the one-flesh union created in marriage permanent until death via being a Creation Ordinance in our next point to consider…that is…

* **Human Marriage Is Designed by God to Display Gospel Realities, Including the Reality of the Unbreakable Union That Jesus Has with the Redeemed READ TWICE.**

We know that Scripture teaches clearly that God will lose none of those He saves. That is, no person truly redeemed by God and united to Christ will ever lose that unity to Jesus.

*There is NO divorce between* Christ and His bride.

Many passages speak to this reality:

**Romans 8:38-39** (NASB) For I am convinced that [nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord

**John 6:37, 39** **37**All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me **I will never cast out**. **39** … **I should lose nothing of all that he has given me** …

So how does this union that Jesus has with His true church relate to our discussion of marriage and divorce?

Recall back to our earlier lessons of this series, Pastor Joshua highlighted the joy that it is for our marriages to be about something much bigger than us; that is, that our human marriages point to the gospel—to Jesus’ union with His bride (the Church).

Do you realize that one of the huge components to the beauty of this gospel is the fact that Jesus and His bride have an **unbreakable** union?

So human marriage points to the union, an **unbreakable** union, between Christ and His bride—the church.

Paul makes this *very important connection* in his letter to the Ephesians:

**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.*

 “This mystery is profound” …this amazing, mysterious thing we call marriage, where two become one, has a reality that it is designed by God to display the union that Jesus has with the redeemed ones, which is an unbreakable union.

This is so important.

But don’t miss something! Look what Paul did. He appeals to the marriage’s Creation Ordinance reality, it’s the same verse we saw in Genesis, and it’s the same words we’ll see Christ Himself teach with.

Paul uses Genesis 2:24 to hold up that married couples must “hold fast” to each other because they have “become one flesh” in a unique way to the marriage relationship, proving that never changes in this first creation **BECAUSE** it points to the gospel reality that Jesus’ relationship with the redeemed ones (His bride) is unbreakable! This is huge. We hope you see how huge this is.

Paul quotes Genesis, the Creation Ordinance, and then declares, “I am saying that [human marriage] refers to Christ and the church.”

From this then, the practical take-away that Paul is getting to is, the marriage covenant two people have entered into must be honored until the death of one of the spouses.

It is not right to desire or initiate divorce from your spouse or if you have divorced it is not right to marry someone else if a former spouse is still living…*because* by doing these things we lie to the world about Jesus and His bride. Do you get that!? Paul’s point is that human marriage points to Christ and the church! H*uman marriage is designed by God to display gospel realities, including the reality of the unbreakable union that Jesus has with the redeemed ones*.

If we don’t honor our life long human marriage covenant we dishonor the Lord Jesus…His commitment to have a bride …the eternal God’s plan and will.

The fact that our covenant to our human marriage points to the enduring love and commitment Christ and His bride have should be jet fuel motivation to live it out—even in the hardest of times. We’ll consider some examples of this later in the lesson.

Let us know and accept the truth that Paul revealed in Ephesians 5, so that we honor God, and His gospel, rightly.

In just this so far, we have seen critical teaching from Scripture on the matter of marriage with definite implications on divorce and remarriage.

If we are clear about the text we have seen it should inform each of us enough so that any other passage we are thinking about is answered in what we have just seen. We should be able to confidently say, **human marriage is *ultimately* not about me, not about my temporary desires or fleshly needs, but about Jesus and His gospel**

But let’s continue on and see more of Scriptures teaching.

Our next point to consider is:

* **The Other Didactic Passages on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the New Testament**

 (didactic means direct, instructional, clear)

When marriage is spoken of in other epistles the direct teaching also confirms the three pillars we established.

Look for example at the didactic (direct, instructional, clear) words from Paul in Romans 7:

Let’s see what Paul is saying here. **Romans 7:1-3**

1Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?

The passage gives us some of the context to the first point Paul is making about the law more generally. And take note, an important point is being made, “the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives.”

So, what does he use as the point to drive this point, a point about law being in place until death? What can be so rock solid as to convince his listeners of what he is trying to teach? The permanence of marriage!

Look, in this didactic passage he goes right to it, verse 2: “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*. 3Accordingly, 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.”

Very clear teaching here. The law of marriage—God’s design for marriage—is that it only ends by death. That is how God sees these things. Know it or not, that is the Author’s design!

Now let’s look at another passage, from 1 Corinthians 7 this time.

In 1 Corinthians 7 various verses speak to the considerations we are focusing on now. Let’s see this:

**1 Corinthians 7:10-11**

10To 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.

PAUSE. When Paul says, “I give this charge (not I, but the Lord)” this means he is restating teaching/instruction that was given explicitly previously by Jesus. At another point he says the opposite, quote “To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord)” and that means that inspired revelation the Apostle is gives hasn’t been given explicitly previously by Jesus.

So, in verse 10 here he is saying that the Permanence teaching of marriage he is going to restate is the same teaching that Jesus taught in His ministry. That is helpful to know for later when we get to Jesus’s words in the gospels. Paul’s inspired interpretation here of Jesus’s earlier teaching tells *us* how to understand Jesus’ teaching (which we’ll look at shortly).

Paul says, “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.”

So, once again we have the didactic command from Scripture regarding our questions for marriage, divorce, remarriage.

It shows us that Initiating or longing for a divorce is never lawful. And that marrying other after a divorce is not allowed. These verses are the inspired Paul’s *perfect interpretation* of the Lord’s prior teaching on these things!

He says, “To the married” the Lord gives this charge, “the wife should not separate from her husband…and the husband should not divorce his wife.” He is saying, “Jesus taught the permeance of marriage, so I to call you to it.”

Note something else, when he says, “if she does [separate from her husband], she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband” he is not giving permission to separate, he clearly says not to, instead he is instructing what to do *if that has happened*.

In this fallen world, things happen that go against God’s design and commands, but rather than leave us in the dark on certain matters, God saw fit to instruct *what to do if* someone finds themselves having already broken a law, in this case the law of marriage.

So, the instruction to one separated from their spouse is one of two things, first he says, “remain unmarried.”

WHEN would this apply?

It would be the case if reconciliation to the spouse is not possible, such as they have already married another.

WHY does God, through Paul, command to remain unmarried?

Because you have entered into a marriage covenant and by God’s design that one-flesh union is until death do you part. If your spouse has not died, it is your call from God to honor the covenant even if the other refuses to—and this is not a waste, it is not meaningless! In doing this *you* still live out God’s design for *you* to show the unbreakable faithfulness of Christ and His bride. Therefore, you don’t marry another person. We’ll talk more about this later.

Or, second, Paul says in the passage, “be reconciled” which would be God’s requirement on us **when possible** based on a right understanding of marriage. This would be possible, for example, if neither spouse has entered into a new marriage covenant.

Again, we will get more practical later and work out some details. There we’re coming back to some of this, but we want to bring some of that clarity now while we’re at this verse.

Now, we also have verse 39 of this chapter to look at for now.

**1 Corinthians 7:39** 39*A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives*. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

Once again, the Permanence pillars are taught. Here in verse 39 again we see that death is the God ordained way to end a marriage, “if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.”

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

Notice quickly an important related point this passage gives us; “if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, **only in the Lord**.”

This informs us that it is God’s desire that *believers only marry believers*. To all who are unmarried, note, this is a clear, non-negotiable from the Lord.

It is God’s design that a believing person *eligible for marriage* only seek and marry a believer—that is the meaning of, “**only in the Lord**.”

Now, we will come back to 1 Cor 7 later as there is more work to be done in that chapter, but since Paul said His teaching was the Lord’s teaching, let’s consider now what Jesus said about these things. So, let’s turn to the Gospel books next.

Of the four Gospel books, there are three where Jesus speaks to marriage relations directly (Matthew, Mark, and Luke); in the Gospel of John He does not.

So, let’s look at these.

In Luke chapter 16, Jesus makes the swift and direct statement about marriage, divorce, and remarriage in verse 18:

**Luke 16:18** **18**“Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

That’s it, there is not related lead up words and nothing about marriage specifically beyond it. That is all that God inspired Luke to write about marriage specifically for those reading his Gospel.

Remember, the third clarity we stated is “Remarrying after divorce is an act of adultery if a former spouse is living.” And we can all see Jesus teach that here in Luke 16:18.

Also note that Jesus says, “he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.” This tells us that even the person who may not have had their own divorce in the past is still also committing adultery in this situation.

Why? Because of the first clarity: “The one-flesh union created in marriage is permanent until the death of one of the spouses.”

The divorced person is still in a one-flesh union with their first spouse. That divorce they took part of does not actually end the one-flesh union in God’s eyes.

So, the not-divorced person marrying a divorced person commits adultery because the person they are marrying is still in a one-flesh marriage union still. That is what Jesus is teaching there, very clear. There should be no confusion to what is being taught there.

That’s Luke’s Gospel.

* **The Mark and Matthew Accounts**

Let’s look at Mark’s Gospel.

The following passage is what God inspired Mark to write on the same interaction Matthew wrote on in his Gospel, which we’ll get to. So, keep that in mind. That means we’ll get to see the unique ways God ordained various audiences to hear the narrative exchange we are about to read.

Before we read it, note two things, first, this is in fact a narrative exchange, which delivers truth in ways unique from a didactic instructional letter, such as from Paul to the Romans.

And second, you need to identify that the Gospel of Mark was written to a gentile audience, a non-Jewish audience. This audience wasn’t naturally part of the Old Covenant, nor familiar with every single one of the Jewish traditions or laws. *This is very important to realize*, and you’ll see why later.

Let’s work through the passage, stopping along the way to explain it.

Before we jump in, state again the three pillars because you’re going to see them all again, here:

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.

Ok… **Mark 10:2-12**

In the first few verses it sets up context for us, the Pharisees approach Jesus to test Him/trap Him (as they often did). They asked him: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”  **3**He answered them, “What did Moses command you?”

These are Pharisees Jesus is talking to—so it’s not unusual that Jesus would ask them what they thought the existing law was on the matter. Jesus does this here intentionally to show that they don’t rightly understand or accept what God’s word said—what God’s law of marriage requires.

Jesus does this to put on display that mankind twists God’s ordinances to make them better suit us because of our fallen nature. And the Pharisees prove just that, look at their response, **4**They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.”

Pause here, so they came to try to prove Jesus was a false teacher, but He flips this on them, proving they don’t understand God’s will for marriage and divorce by their answer to His question. Look what Jesus says in reply to this answer. **5**And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. **6**But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ **7**‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, **8**and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. **9**What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Jesus could not be clearer here.

First, he tells them, that what Moses wrote (which was not a permission for divorce) was due to the reality of broken marriages due the fall, **and then** He tells them clearly that divorce is not God’s will or design for marriage. “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

In this, Jesus tells them they have a wrong understanding about marriage and divorce. He’s exposing that they are not seeking to honor God’s desire for marriage.

Look at this, **this is key**, what does Jesus appeal to **in order to prove them wrong** in their understanding of Moses and of God’s command for marriage? Look, verses 6-8:

**6**But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ **7**‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, **8**and the two shall become one flesh.’

At this point in our study Jesus’ words here should be VERY familiar to you……...it is the Creation Ordinance! Just like we saw the Apostle Paul do, Jesus says the decisive thing about the design and longevity for marriage is God’s Creation Ordinance. That is hugely significant.

Then, Jesus declares something so important, verse 9: “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

This crushes anyone’s thought that mankind has the right to do what they wish about marriage and divorce.

What GOD has joined together, let not man separate!

What GOD has joined together, let not man separate!

What GOD has joined together, let NOT man separate!

This is God’s will and design for marriage, that divorce not happen. Jesus uses the Creation Ordinance reality to undergird this point, “**from the beginning of creation**, [then Jesus quotes for the Creation Ordinance in Genesis] So they are no longer two but one flesh. [then Jesus adds His reinforcing comment] **9**What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Remember what we said in the beginning: The one-flesh union created in marriage is permanent until the death of one of the spouses. And initiating or longing for a divorce is never lawful.

That is what Jesus is teaching here. He was asked directly: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

And Jesus answers directly that God’s will and design of marriage has never changed, (and it won’t in this creation since it’s a Creation Ordinance) therefore, a married couple “are no longer two but one flesh. **9**What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Asked and answered.

Asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” and answered, No. “What…God has joined together, let not man separate.”

*Now, this answer is not what our fallen flesh wants—we want “outs,” we want safety nets, we want “just in case it goes bad or I’m not happy.”* We now—and people back then.

Look as it continues we see even His disciples wanted to double check His answer.

**10**And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. **11**And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, **12**and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

In this we see that, remarrying after divorce is an act of adultery.

Notice closely what Jesus, and our third pillar says:

If a person divorces their spouse and marries another person, they **commit** adultery.

**Commit** adultery. The word is not an ongoing act of repeated sin. The ***act*** of **getting married** (if a former spouse is living) is adultery.

Listen carefully, this means the whole marriage is not adultery every day, this means the whole marriage should *not* be thought of as an ongoing act of sin. And that is why our point is written how it is; Remarrying after divorce **is an act of adultery** if a former spouse is living.

If you are in this situation, you have remarried after a divorce and your former spouse is living (or was living at that time), then make sure you understand how Jesus and we say this. Entering into that new marriage was a one-time act of adultery. Not Jesus, nor us, see that marriage as ongoing repeated sin. The words of Jesus should convict anyone in that case, and you should run to Jesus and His amazing grace in confession and repentance to agree with Him that it was an act of adultery and that you, by grace through faith in Him, *are* forgiven of it, so that you may live in the marriage you are now in to glorify Him.

In fact, this sort of realization of biblical truth and Christian repentance has happened in this very church. A few of our couples in leadership are an example to this, Rob & Laurie and Scott & Blanca have lived this out. In each of those marriages, the wife had been previously married and divorced. None of them were fully aware of these truths when they entered into the marriages they are now in, but once they learned these things they walked out the confession, repentance, and commitment to honor God moving forward. It's a beautiful testimony of God's grace for them to not reject this teaching but embrace it. They trust God is at work in their marriage and know their marriage is no less than another's.

Big truth requires intentional and God-focused handling of it.

Now, as we transition to the next passage, think about something in regard to this passage in Mark: All the gentiles that received this Gospel—this is the testimony our God ordained for them to know. They would likewise come to the conclusion, and rightfully so, that there is no permission to initiate or long for a divorce, or to remarry after divorce if a former spouse is living. So once again, a massive audience getting that instruction from the Lord.

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

Let’s look at the passages now.

Since we walked though this same dialog in Mark already we won’t repeat ourselves fully. But know that this passage is Matthew’s perspective of *the same exchange* that Mark’s Gospel had in chapter 10.

**Matthew 19:3-12**

The content from Mark we just looked at is covered, then, jumping down to verse 9 (for the sake of time), we come to the more difficult portion for people to correctly understand. Jesus 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. We find this kind of statement here and also in Matthew 5.

 “… everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery ...”

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

But, in many cases throughout Scripture, 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 possibility of wrong and harmful conclusions. EXPAND (verse in OT about putting children to death, etc.) So, let’s be sure we carefully consider what each verse in the Bible truly means.

As the case with some of Matthew 5 and 19, when we come to unclear or seemingly contradictory passages, to honor God and understand His word correctly, we need to let all of Scripture, *rightly understood and informing how we interpret*, help us understand what and why the Gospel of Matthew says what it says.

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?

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 the word more technically (accurately) translated in older translations, such as:

KJV “Whosoever *shall put away* his wife”

YLT “whoever *may put away* his wife”

Many times throughout Scripture the Greek word is used, and it means something definitively different than marital 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 commonly translated elsewhere dismiss, put away, etc.

The reason for this clarity is not to say the word can’t mean divorce, 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 the translators deciding to translate it “divorce” in our Matthew passages 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**. Possibly a separation of betrothed persons (formally committed, but not yet a one-flesh union) and/or 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?

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 the Jews. And we know that the Jews have Old Covenant 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.

In Matthew 1 you see a long list of names *you* know (or knew) very little about since it’s likely not your natural 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 in the redemption story and why it’s in Matthew’s Gospel? Very little to none.

Get this: 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 then understand its reason for being in Matthew’s Gospel like it is.

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

Let me explain.

The period of time this exchanged happened, the Old Covenant was still in play. And Jesus upheld it in His incarnated time under the Old Covenant. The Jews were bound by it and they knew its laws. We see this especially in Matthew’s Gospel (since it’s the Gospel to the Jews).

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

So, consider these facts carefully…

Primarily, who was in the Old Covenant? *Israelites. Jews.*

What did the Old Covenant set forth for those caught in sexual immorality? What was the consequence for that sin? *Death.*

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

So then, when the Jewish audience reads in Matthew’s Gospel “whoever [puts away] 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.

The Jews in the Old Covenant would hear Christ as saying, “whoever ends his marriage 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 in 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 woman *separated* from her husband commits adultery.”

See our, New Covenant, 21st Century, gentile minds, don’t automatically 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.

Death ends the marriage, death was the punishment for sexual immorality. Marrying someone separated from a living spouse is an act of adultery since the one-flesh union God created is still intact.

So, based on all that we have seen in this study and because of an informed reading of Matthew’s Gospel, the “except for sexual immorality” is *not* a permission to *divorce*.

Back to the passage, look at this, the disciples correctly took Jesus’ words in Matthew 19 to mean the one-flesh union created in marriage is permanent until the death of one of the spouses.

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, 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 have the gift of singleness from God or should realize they have that gift of singleness. For it is better to be single than to disobey God’s design for marriage.

Big stuff.

We covered a lot there, but in summary, in Matthew 19, Jesus expresses God’s will for human marriage (the same teaching the rest of Scripture has, namely, “What…God has joined together, let not man separate.”

We should not get thrown off by what seems contradictory or confusing in “except for sexual immorality” because we cannot abandon Christ’s unwavering, totally clear, answer given in the context of our passage and Gospel book. Remember **the Bible does not contradict itself**. All of Scripture on any topic, must be pointing to the same truth.

So that’s Matthew’s Gospel.

* **Applying God’s Design in a Broken World**
* **An Unbelieving Spouse Who Forces a Divorce on a Believer**

Let’s look at one more passage, back to 1 Corinthians 7.

We read verses 10 and 11 previously, so jump down to verse 12:

**1 Corinthians 7:12-13**

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

**12**To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) [[Remember, Paul is an Apostle inspired by the Holy Spirit so what He says here means Jesus had not **specifically** given this situational instruction in His ministry prior, but it’s God speaking through him now. Here it is:]] ~~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, here Paul is lifting up and giving this situational instruction on the heels of the permanence teaching he just finished in the prior verses. Paul teaches that initiating or longing for a divorce is not 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 work for the marriage, **but you are not sovereign over the unbelieving spouse, so you cannot control them**. The implications of this are you are not in sin, if you are abandoned or divorced by an unbeliever causing it. (You may have sin in other regards to repent of, but a separation forced on you by an unbelieving spouse is not your sin.) To be clear, the believer is not insisting on a divorce or longing for it, the unbeliever is insisting on it.

Additionally, the believer “is not enslaved” (in the text there) is speaking to the kind of effort one must take (or doesn’t have to 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 (with a clear conscience) a separation/divorce forced by the unbeliever.

The second pillar 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. You’re not sovereign over that person.

*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 the death of one of the spouses. And remarrying after divorce is an act of adultery if a former spouse is living.

Just because you may submit to 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 the death of one of the spouses. 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, even in the cause of being forcibly divorced by an unbeliever*.

Practically, it 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 your spouse you had hoped for (at least so far as you can tell at this time), 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’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 in the struggle.

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. Perhaps 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 until death commitment to it, 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 (true believers) even when we sin after being united to Him. See, Jesus doesn’t stay faithful to true believers 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.*”

Unmarried divorced brothers and sisters among us or listening to this audio later: Don’t miss this powerful opportunity. Use it as a means to glorify God and proclaim the gospel!

And be sure of this: 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, building on that, most importantly, God’s word is the authority and 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.

As we conclude our passage walkthrough, we hope you saw in Scripture the three pillars we stated at the beginning.

Now, this serves as a good segue. We need to use remaining time to answer some other common questions.

The first question to cover:

Q: Does Scripture advocate 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, NO, this teaching **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. Abuse of another human being is terrible and completely unacceptable.

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

First, let me say that you need to realize that someone would have 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.

That said, what does a person do?

If abuse happens, Scripture would put that squarely in the category of ***sin that needs to be exposed* and repented of**.

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

So, what this looks like, say for example, is if a spouse is physically abused, the clear counsel we are giving is **get out of the physical situation (leave the area), get help, get accountable space, and proceed seeking biblical results**. Divorce is not the solution but getting to a safe haven (some kind of accountable space), bringing in proper accountability, and praying for repentance is.

In many cases, abuse will justly require law enforcement to be called and if a spouse is found guilty of abuse they may be put in jail.

Understand that Christian grace and forgiveness doesn’t mean we encourage or give room for people to practice sin. We still 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 the covenant of marriage through divorce.

This leads us to a second related question:

Q: If a spouse is put in jail, especially for a long time, is divorce and remarriage permissible in Scripture 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 available ways to the incarcerated spouse—this is telling the world the same gospel good news about Jesus’ faithfulness to His redeemed even in their sin.

Think for a moment of this example, 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—even more with your spouse as you are one-flesh with them. You are still married to them! Incarnation changes the day-to-day function of the relationship immensely, but it doesn’t mean you move on. Only death ends the one-flesh relationship.

Ok, next, this is a big one, fairly common:

Q: What if I was divorced before I knew correctly what Scripture says about it or before I was saved even, and I am not yet in a new marriage, 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. Remember, marriage is not a Christian only institution, it’s a Creation Ordinance. 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 the death of one of the spouses.

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.

Now, another common question:

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

A: You need to honor, in the here and now, the most recent marriage that you have committed to. 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. Do not sin again by having another divorce.

Your new marriage is real and should be honored until death. *We have many married couples in our church where one or both sides have been married before. This doesn’t make these current marriages second rate or looked down on. They are to be upheld and fought for just like anyone else, and we are happy to walk with you and grow with you in your marriage if this is your history.*

Additionally, it is important that you agree with the Scripture we saw in these lessons, and rightfully say that the act of getting married (in the two situations in question) was a sin (it was an act of adultery), confess it as such, and then, in an act of repentance honor that real marriage you are in….living each day in faithfulness to your new spouse, until death do you part, for God’s glory. As a redeemed believer, 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 and not remarried (or anyone interested in a divorce person) is hearing this and thinks, well, I really want to get married so I’ll just commit the sin, confess it as sin, and then have my spouse. Do not do this. It spits in the face of God. This would call for accountability and church discipline. 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 should be your joy to keep His commandments. Do not commit presumptuous, preconceived sin.

We’re out of time. There are surely other questions, in light of Scriptures teaching and our human circumstances, that come up and we can answer them as needed.

As we close we want to remind you that all of us should seek to honor God’s expressed will as our highest desire.

One of the things we mean by this 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 or desires.

Remember something very important: Jesus made it clear, when he was asked about this topic, that God’s expressed will is ultimately that mankind should honor their one-flesh marriage union until death. That was His point to the Pharisees and others listening in…don’t lean on outs—don’t do what your flesh wants—do what God wants—*what God has joined together, let man note separate*.

Your pastors here 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, I will deny myself when I conflict with God’s 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 that your pastors and group leaders are here to walk with you, love you, and help you with current marriage struggles or past hurts stemming from divorce. We do this according to what God’s expressed will is, as found in His word (Scripture).

God is good, this topic can be hard in our fallen context, but we are committed to walking with you through it. Please feel free to reach out to your leaders with any additional questions you may have. As part of our answer to those questions we may have a resource or two for you to use in working it.

Let’s pray…