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**“Divorce Proofing Your Marriage”  
(Matthew 5:31-32)  
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**Introduction:**

Recently in the news there was a so-called controversial pastor in an evangelical mega church in Dallas Texas that was making headlines all across America and even into Canada. Here’s what he was challenging the married people of his congregation with: Have sex for seven days straight. So he brought a bed onto the stage of the church and gave the sermon sitting on the bed. That’s what I read. And it was received with a lot of controversy from inside and outside the evangelical community. Why? What prompted him to give a challenge like that? The reason was to help Christians begin talking about sex as God’s design. He said that the culture has influenced our view of sex for too long and so Christians should take back sex. And what better way than to have sex for seven days straight. He’s hoping that marriages will grow in not only sexual, but also emotional intimacy. He hopes that this will be the beginning of healing and forgiveness in many marriages.

And I also heard that one of the reasons he issued this challenge was because of all the sexual temptation that’s out there for both men and women whether it’s at the work place, the media, or porn on the internet. And a lot of that stuff leads marriages down the wrong path which often times lead to divorce. Listen to what the bible says to those who’ve been married a while.

**Proverbs 5:**

<sup>18</sup> *May your fountain be blessed,  
and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.*

<sup>19A</sup> *loving doe, a graceful deer—  
may her breasts satisfy you always,  
may you ever be intoxicated with her love.*

<sup>20</sup> *Why, my son, be intoxicated with another man's wife?  
Why embrace the bosom of a wayward woman?*

On a side note to singles, dating and engaged folks...

You know Linda and I were planning to have a summer wedding. It was to be in June, July of 1994. And I was sharing with a mentor of mine the struggles with temptation because once you’re engaged, all you think about is the wedding night. And so the mentor says to me, “Peter what will be different in your situation between June and let’s say six months earlier, January?” He asked things like, are you gonna be done with school by then? No. Will you have more money saved up by then? No. Then why June instead of January? I said...cuz it’s warmer out. And he just challenged us to get married earlier. And he was as blunt as a dull axe and he said, Look get married and have sex. Why kill yourself for six months? Why risk falling into sin? Just get married. And so we prayed about it? We asked our hormones, what do you think? And our hormones agreed. And then we told our parents. And the first thing Linda’s grandmother asks is...guess what...are you pregnant? Is this a shotgun wedding? And of course we vehemently denied that and of course we didn’t want to tell the real spiritual answer, “Uh, because we want to have sex.”

So here’s my challenge to singles. Wouldn’t God be more honored that you get real about your temptations, and even though the finances aren’t all in place, and the job isn’t totally secure, and

whatever else it is you're waiting for...but wouldn't it be better, wouldn't God be honored when you say, 'Lord, I'd rather be married, than fall into sin, or continue sinning'? I think so. And so that's why I'm not crazy about engagement periods that last more than a year. If I could have my way, I'd say six to eight months is better.

Anyway, let's segue into the theme for today: divorce.

This section in the Sermon on the Mount comes right after Jesus' teaching on lust and adultery. Remember he was saying that it's not just about sleeping with another person. It's more than that. To think lustfully about another person is sin as well.

**TNIV Matthew 5:31-32**

*<sup>31</sup>"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' <sup>32</sup>But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.*

So what does the bible teach us about divorce?

Understand that whenever we ask that type of question, "What does the bible teach about whatever subject like, raising children, singleness, spiritual gifts, money, etc.? you have to formulate your answer based on all the evidence, not based on favorite verses or just one or two sections. You have to include all the data.

There are several relevant passages on divorce in the bible. We can't look at all of them, but we can look at a few.

So let's unpack this topic a bit.

All teaching on divorce in the whole bible is based on Genesis 1 and 2. We cannot understand divorce if we do not understand God's design for marriage. A few things about marriage.

- It was God's design
- It reflects the tri-une nature of God.
- It was to be between one man and one woman only
- It was to be for a lifetime.
- The mystery in the marriage was that two radically unique and different individuals mysteriously become one.
- It was the arena where sex was to be practiced and enjoyed.
- It was how families will be made.
- It was the means of populating the earth.
- It was a covenant, not a contract. It was a promise based on love and trust, not a business agreement.
- And I'm sure there are more things, but that's good enough for now.

So that's God's design for marriage. It's incredible. It's beautiful.

And then in Deuteronomy you have Moses' instruction about divorce.

**Deuteronomy 24:1-4**

*<sup>1</sup>If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, <sup>2</sup>and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, <sup>3</sup>and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, <sup>4</sup>then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.*

So from this passage, God is giving an exit-clause from marriage. Indecency, or sexual misconduct. That's the reason for divorce. So again, you see why Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount speaks about divorce right after speaking about lust and adultery.

In fact all of Jesus' teaching on divorce is based on these two truths of the Old Testament---first the marriage covenant in Genesis, and second, the Mosaic prescription for divorce.

So when Jesus says, "It has been said..." in Matthew 5 He's referencing Deu. 24. The people of those times were finding any and every reason to divorce their wives from something as awful as adultery to something as trivial as cooking a meal poorly, which is not much different from our culture today.

In Matthew 5, Jesus makes it clear. Divorce is permissible on the grounds of adultery.

Look what's said in an interchange between the Pharisees and Jesus in Matt 19:

**Matthew 19:3-9**

*<sup>3</sup>Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" <sup>4</sup>"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' <sup>5</sup>and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' ? <sup>6</sup>So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." <sup>7</sup>"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" <sup>8</sup>Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. <sup>9</sup>I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."*

In this passage, Jesus states that sexual immorality is a ground for divorce. So it's not just sleeping with another person, it can be sexual perversion or deviancy that can be grounds for divorce. So the divorce laws were so loose that the Pharisees could even ask the question, "divorce, for any and every reason."

Recently in the news there was a couple who met online. And they were rather unattractive people, but they got married. Great. After being married, they created online avatars, characters, and of course the man's avatar looks like 007 and the woman's avatar was beautiful too. And so they're role playing live in the virtual world. And so the man's avatar, not the man himself, had a virtual affair. And the wife filed for divorce. Isn't that crazy? I don't know if that would qualify or not. I suppose if the person had so identified with his avatar and he was basically living out a mental desire in the virtual world, I suppose he did in the emotional sense, commit adultery. Anyway food for thought.

So what do we have so far.

- Adultery is a grounds for divorce.
- Sexual deviancy is a grounds for divorce.

And then there's a final passage given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:10-15. W

*<sup>10</sup>To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. <sup>11</sup>But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. <sup>12</sup>To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. <sup>13</sup>And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. <sup>14</sup>For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. <sup>15</sup>But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.*

From this passage Paul teaches that abandonment is a grounds for divorce. The scenario goes like this. A husband and wife were both non-Christians and living lives that reflected that. Then one of them hears the gospel and one of them becomes a follower of Jesus. This changes everything. They used to be into smoking pot together. They used to cheat on their taxes together. They used to go to the local new age bookstore together. And now the Christian partner doesn't want any of that. She wants to go to church. She wants to be honest. She doesn't want to read new age stuff, she just wants to read the bible. She doesn't want to smoke dope her hubby. And the husband is thinking. This is not what I signed up for, I'm outta here. And he leaves the wife, the kids, everything. And in a scenario like that, Paul says, you are allowed to divorce.

So what do we have so far as biblical grounds for divorce

- Adultery is grounds for divorce.
- Sexual deviancy is grounds for divorce.
- Abandonment is grounds for divorce.

But is that it? Are there any other scenarios for allowable divorce?

I believe there is. Think of the following scenarios.

1. abuse of children/spouse
2. drug/gambling addiction
3. not failure, but as the man, unwillingness to feed and care for the family.
4. what about being married to a partner who sexually abstains?
5. what about emotional torment?

But Jesus nor Paul explicitly speaks of these matters. Allow me to make a principled argument from silence.

First, when Jesus and Paul speak on divorce, they are addressing very specific scenarios and very specific questions and are giving their response to those very questions.

So if someone comes to me and says, Peter, as a Christian am I allowed to listen to music by Madonna? And I say "no, you may not". You would not then conclude, I am permitted to listen to

every artist and musician, every genre of music except for Madonna. Of course not. I am giving you a specific answer to a specific question. And that's what Jesus and Paul were doing.

Second, then what principles in scripture allow for divorce on other grounds? Let's take a look at this passage.

Exodus 21:10-11 says these interesting words.

*<sup>10</sup>If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights (sexual). <sup>11</sup>If he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free, without any payment of money.*

This passage talks about three things that should be a right in every marriage.

- 1) provision – food,
- 2) clothing and
- 3) sex.

When these three things are not happening, it became grounds for divorce.

So you can see that there are other options in scripture for divorce, but it should always be seen as a final option. And you really have to involve the leadership of the church to help you through this.

In any and every case where a marriage has come to the point of divorce, we must all realize that divorce is the final and last option. We have to always be open to the option of counseling, of restoration, of forgiveness and reconciliation. Divorce is the last option. And that's the way God has dealt with us throughout history. He refers to Israel and now the Church as his bride and there are times when divorce seems like the best choice for God, but He remains faithful, even when we are unfaithful.

Listen to what is said by the prophet Malachi.

**Malachi 2:13-16**

*<sup>13</sup>Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer looks with favor on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. <sup>14</sup>You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. <sup>15</sup>Has not the LORD made the two of you one? You belong to him in body and spirit. And why has he made you one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth. <sup>16</sup>"I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate it when people clothe themselves with injustice," says the LORD Almighty. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.*

Folks, God hates divorce. There were a few other vices and sins where God used really strong language like this. He says that he hates it when people swear falsely, meaningless religiosity, idolatry, robbery, iniquity, and in there he says, I hate divorce. Divorce ruins the plans of the Kingdom. Think about it—how can we focus on reaching our neighbors, transforming our work place, building the church, and other kingdom initiatives when the home front is on the brink of divorce. It's unthinkable. That's why God hates it. God hates it because it's smacks right in the face of his loving plans for men and women. He created marriage because he loves us. And he hates it because God is a God of covenant and promise. He never lies and always keeps his word to us. And he expects his creation to be the same. And divorce breaks the covenant and promise we made on our wedding day.

**Application:**

For those of us who are married, you might be in a situation where the thought of divorce has come up as a viable option. If you're in that situation right now, I plead with you to seek help. Go into counseling. Seek the prayers of those who love and care for you.

And there are those of us who are married and divorce is absolutely not an option for us. We would never under any circumstance consider divorce, but if we're honest with ourselves, we cannot say that our marriage is healthy either. Your marriage might be nothing more than co-habitation, co-existence. There may be very little intimacy emotionally, sexually, and other ways. Maybe you've stopped dreaming about life together and the plans God has for your future? You might just be in it for the kids. And that's not God's design for your marriage either. And I'll say the same thing to you. Get counseling. Get a third party to mediate and restore your relationship.

If you've been married five years and under, I think you're in a stage where you should be building a strong foundation of intimacy and communication in marriage, it's based on prayer and connecting with each other as you connect with Christ. And then we have kids and that sort of derails us, but we eventually recover and you learn how to raise a godly Christian family and godly Christian kids. And then you enter your tenth year and beyond and by this time, the two of you should be clicking together, really in sync, on living a life, and raising a Kingdom impacting family. And then into your twentieth year and beyond, man the two of you should be experiencing a deeper and greater degree of love and intimacy and connection and you're moving on all cylinders, impacting many around you through your marriage.

A healthy marriage is absolutely essential to live out the plans God has for you and your family. If our marriages are unstable, it'll be nearly impossible for us to be used by God effectively. Let's commit our marriages to God. Single folks, pray for the married people in our church. In fact lets pray right now.