

## **When Marriages Go Bad – 11/20/2011**

*Greg Boyd*

“Marvelous! Marvelous!” And so, thank you. I’ll try. You know, I’ve got one more shooting for this movie that I’m in, and so the cat’s out of the bag now, so we can talk about it. It’s called “A Chance of Rain.” And a friend of mine wrote a script, and it worked its way up to the top and a Hollywood producer got ahold of it. So she wanted me to have a bit of a role in it. So I was playing a homeless person, which is why I grew a beard. If I don’t comb my hair, it’s huge. I have to pack it now and it’s really getting out of control. But that will be in January, so I can shave after that. But now I’m not sure I’m going to. I took a vote last night, which two-thirds thought I should keep it. The only vote that counts is Shelley’s, my wife’s, and it’s all that matters.

And so, anyway, we’re in a series, “Relatively Speaking,” talking about relationships, relatives, and all of that. And we’re taking a Kingdom-look at all these aspects of our relationships. So, by way of review, I know you might be sick of me doing this, but it’s a foundation of it all, we’ve seen in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish culture, as in most traditional cultures, the father completely defined the family, had total authority over the family, and the primary allegiance of everybody was to their father. He was the foundation of the whole social structure. The job of the kids was to carry out the will of the father, and to honor the father, and to expand the father’s family by getting married and having kids. We’ve seen that Jesus takes that patriarchal paradigm and applies it to our relationship with God. So that when we submit ourselves to Abba-Father and he, God, becomes our Abba Father, meaning dad, there’s an intimate relationship that’s created there. We become his children, his dear children, and we become brothers and sisters with one another. And our relationship with Abba-Father is to totally define us. That’s where we’re supposed to get our identity, our worth, and our security, from him...nothing else. Then our total allegiance is to Abba-Father. There is no competition in our allegiance there and our job is to live in a way that brings honor to our Father, and to carry out his will on earth as it is in heaven, and that expands the Fathers’ family.

And that’s the framework where we’re seeing all of our relationships. Last week we talked about marriage. To those who weren’t here last week, I encourage you to download that. Wives, you may specially want to download that and share it with your husbands. And so I want to continue that this morning and then move into another area, as well.

We're going to be talking about bad marriages today, a pretty topic. Enjoy it for the Lord. It is entitled "When Marriages Go Bad," then I'm going to talk about divorce and re-marriage. And we're going to frame all of this in a Kingdom-way. Even though you're not in a bad marriage or not divorced, I assure you that the framework we're giving here is something that applies to everything. So stay tuned in even if your marriage is wonderful or you're not married at all. It's going to apply to you. So pray with me here for a moment.

Abba-Father, we are your children. And, God, we just want to have our...we were just saying a little bit ago, we just want to be transformed by the power of your love, we want to have our minds renewed, and we want to have a Kingdom-perspective on everything. So, Lord, use this message, infuse it with your power and authority to do what needs to be done, bring the Kingdom into every area of our life and to every situation that people are in.

I pray, Lord God, that this would be a message that would strengthen marriages that would need strengthening by the power of your love, and that it would heal marriages that need healing by the power of your love, and that it would re-ignite marriages that need to be reignited by the power of your love. And, God, that it would save marriages that need to be saved by the power of your love. I also pray, Lord God, for those who have been divorced or, perhaps, remarried. I pray that this message would be one that is transforming for them and liberating for them and encouraging to them and bring insight to them. And for all of us, Lord God, use this message to just further instill in our brains and most especially in our hearts the beauty of your Kingdom, the uniqueness, the radicalness of your Kingdom. That's the lens with which we look at everything. In Jesus' name we pray, and all of God's people said... AMEN!

Bad marriages...we're going to talk about that first, then we're going to talk about divorce. This is going to be a message that is rather intense on the teaching end of things, once again, so keep your thinking caps on, especially, in five minutes we're going to get to some thick stuff.

We saw a couple of weeks ago that God's purpose for marriage is, on one hand, put on display the uniqueness of his love. The one-flesh relationship displays something of a triune God in a unique way. It's a symbol or representation of his love. And God's purpose for marriage is to grow us and to mature us. It was one of his plans for character development. And then God's plan for marriage is that it can be used to expand the family, to advance the Kingdom whether it is by having kids or adopting kids or through evangelism and ministry. Couples are to work together to be furthering the Kingdom. That's God's plan for marriage.

Now, notice there that God's plan for marriage does not involve us being happier. That's our plan for marriage. That's NOT his. I think if you have a Kingdom marriage, you're going to be happy. But happiness isn't the goal, which means, Kingdom-people, listen now, it means that if we are seeking first the Kingdom of God, bailing out of a marriage because you weren't happy is simply not an option. That wasn't the purpose of getting into it, so that's not the reason for getting out of it. That's the main reason why, for people in the world, their marriages are not happy. They believe they have a right to be happy. So, if it's not working for them, they get out of it.

But you see, Kingdom-people, we don't have a right to be happy. Our whole allegiance is to Abba-Father, and we're to be following him and carrying out his will. So our job then is, if you're in a difficult marriage that is miserable, and sometimes they can be miserable, to stay in that, to honor God by staying in that and working on it. And we don't honor God by just staying in it. You're not honoring God and you're not fulfilling God's purpose in marriage if you're just wallowing in misery. "Oh, I'm righteous because I'm staying in this marriage." But that's not honoring God. It's not honoring God just because there's a rule in marriage that you can't get a divorce. No! No! What honors God is when you stay in a marriage and you work at it to move it in a direction of a Kingdom-marriage and you move in a direction where you put on display the power of his love, the beauty of his love in that one-flesh relationship, however bad the marriage is.

I don't know whom I'm talking to here. Maybe someone in the auditorium, maybe it's someone podcasting, likely, it is both, but however bad your marriage is, I can tell you and promise you this: If you're a brother and sister in Christ, remember we're brothers and sisters before we're husbands and wives, if you're a brother and sister in Abba's family, sit down together and say in allegiance to Abba-Father that we're going to make this thing work, we're going to work on this thing. I promise you that you can move it in a Kingdom direction. It may never be the easiest marriage in the world, but, you know what, that will grow you. That will fulfill his purposes for the marriage, and you can have a marriage in which you're happy. That's not the goal, but that is a side-effect of having a marriage that's reflecting God's love in which two people are growing in Christ and, therefore, growing together.

It's not easy. Lord knows it's not easy. It's going to involve, sometimes, you crucifying yourself. It involves you suffering for righteousness sake. But Jesus tells us we've got to be prepared to do that. It means you have to take up your cross for a while. For a while means you need to forfeit your "right to happiness." But it is worth it. It is worth it *and it's so worth it*. You may be listening to this and saying to yourself, "Well, what do you know, preacher? You're in a good

marriage. You have no idea how miserable I am.” [“BRAVO!”] I do know how miserable you could be. My marriage wasn’t always a good one. I’ve shared this before and so I’ll be sharing this again this week. But we’re supposed to share our experiences. And that’s one of the ways that God brings the good out of people.

Sixteen years ago, Shelley and I went through a six-month period where we both wanted out of this thing like it was nobody’s business. When we first got married, as it often happens, about a month into the marriage you sense that you married someone from a different universe. They say opposites attract and, man, is that true of us. It feels like, “Who are you?” It’s so very different, and I think it scared us. Looking back at it, I think a lot of us don’t consciously think of, but it’s like we so didn’t want to get into a divorce, that we thought we’re afraid that if we look too long at this vacuum between us, this enormous gulf between us, that it might end in divorce, so found a way of doing marriage without paying attention to that.

I was in graduate school and then we had kids. So you create a lot of fullness, which can easily cloak the difficulties that are there. There are a lot of issues to deal with when you come from different universes. And so, for the first 16 years of our marriage, you know what, on the surface it looks like we had a pretty good marriage, and it seemed like a fairly good marriage, but we were not dealing with the issue. Now, as the kids got older, the universe of difference between us came more and more on the surface until it came to a point about 16 years ago, and we’ve been married now for 32 years now, it came to a point where we had to look at that “ugly elephant” in the middle of the room and name it. In fact, when it turned, what we saw was that not only did we start a universe apart but, in that 16 years, we’ve grown further apart. And we had no way of getting into that other person’s life and in the inside. On the surface, it was okay, but the core of our beings were just in totally different places.

So we had to name that thing, and it looked hopeless. It was painful. It was really, really difficult. The first counselor we went to, the first counselor after the first session said to us, “I think we should look how to amicably end this marriage because I don’t see anything that you have to work with.” First session. A great counselor, he said it was hopeless. I even had a small group who said it was hopeless. We looked at divorce, we considered that, but we made a decision to stay in it because it was out of sheer commitment. We made a promise, a vow to Abba-Father that we were going to be married for life, and so we have got to work this out, and it feels like you’re both trapped in a room together.

But, you see, in some ways that develops some kind of a partnership. We've got no other options. We're in this. We've shut the divorce door, so we've got to make this work. It took a lot of work and a lot of effort, but we've found ways of getting into each other's lives, of getting to the insides and start sharing our hearts. And, today, I can't believe how much I love my wife and how much she loves me, and we have a marriage that...Amen...puts God's love on display.

If we can do it, you can do it, too. It can be done. I'm telling you that it can be done! It's not easy. You've got to crucify yourself. But, if you together make the decision to work at this, you can move in the direction of having a marriage that honors God and puts his love on display, in which you find happiness. So I encourage you. If you are in a bad marriage, I encourage you not to bail. But I also encourage you not to just endure it. That's not righteous. Rather, get in the game. I encourage you to sit down as brothers and sisters in Christ and say, "You know what, we're going to honor Abba-Father, so we're going to do whatever it takes to move this marriage in a direction of a God-honoring marriage."

I encourage you to forgive all wrongs that have been done just as Christ forgives you. I encourage you to commit to spending time together. I encourage you to commit to praying together, to doing ministry together, and I encourage you to commit to finding friends to bring into your life, a community, because communities fortify marriages. You're not supposed to do it alone. This idea that we have a completely nuclear family is totally unbiblical. We're supposed to all be embedded in community. And, if it's necessary, I encourage you to get a counselor.

Our first counselor was, obviously, not a good one, so I encourage you to get a Kingdom-counselor, a counselor who shares your Kingdom values, who can understand some of what you're up to. But we got another counselor involved in our marriage later on that was really helpful and helped really save our marriage and helped us to understand one another. And so we've got a list of counselors here at our church that we've vetted, and if you need help in kind of narrowing down the field, you can call the church and get help there. But don't bail and don't endure. Rather, stay in it and work at it.

Now, what if you're married to one who's not a believer? The Bible gives us some very specific instructions on that. In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7, Paul says that if you're married to an unbeliever or, what is, really, the same thing, someone, maybe, who believes but they're not a disciple, it doesn't have an impact in their lives, Paul says, if you're married to an unbeliever and the unbeliever is willing to stay, then you should stay in the marriage. Of course, they can't share your Kingdom-motivation, but you can still honor Abba-Father by working to have the best

marriage you can, a marriage that puts on display his love, even though that person's an unbeliever. And then Paul says in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthian 7 that, by staying in the marriage, you have a sanctifying influence on your husband or wife and the children, your Kingdom-presence is there.

So all those principles I gave apply to you even though your spouse doesn't share your Kingdom-motivation. Stay in the marriage. And, having said that, when two people are in Christ working at it, divorce should never happen. But it does. In a fallen world, divorce happens. So we need to talk about it. And I and my Prep Team have decided that the issue we should address, because there's a lot of confusion on this, is the issue of: Is it an option that a divorced person be remarried? Is that an option? It is a really important question for us here at Woodland Hills Church because we always have a heavy stress, a strong stress that there's no hierarchy of sins, and that strong emphasis that there is no deal-breaker sins, and a strong emphasis that there is no place for judgments in the body of Christ. Because of that, a lot of folks who sort of feel stigmatized in other churches end up coming to Woodland Hills Church. And so we have, I think, a higher percentage of divorced people, and I thank God for that.

But then that gives us an important question. What makes it a challenging question is this: We find that Jesus, several times, gives this teaching. It is found, in one instance, in Matthew 19:9.

*"I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immortality, and marries another woman commits adultery."*

What do we do with that? It sounds like Jesus is saying here that if a person gets a divorce and remarried or if someone marries a divorced person, you're committing adultery. And so, following from that, it seems that if a person gets divorced they should never get remarried and you should never marry a divorced person. What do we do with this? Now, before I address that particular passage, I want to zoom out a little bit and make sure we keep a Kingdom-perspective on this. All right? It makes all the difference in the world how you frame an issue. And so the way this topic is almost always dealt with, I got to read a book that has a different approach on this, the way it is usually dealt with is that it is construed as an issue of technical legalities. So everything hangs upon what exactly are the justified grounds of getting a divorce. Legally, how would you justify getting a divorce? And what are the exact grounds on when you can get remarried? And what does Jesus exactly mean about sexual immortality, that exception clause that he gives? And so people debate those specific terms. And like in so many other issues, Christians often treat the Bible like it was a book of laws. God is sort of a cosmic judge, and those laws either excuse us or accuse us, and our job is to sort of learn about it and obey the legal technicalities. You see, that is how the issue is usually portrayed as. Often, in fact,

and I'd say, as it often happens, whenever you construe an issue in terms of legal technicalities, at least, to bizarre situations, to bizarre conclusions, like, for example: A lot of Christians believe that when two people are married, they become one, which is true, and that they're always one in God's eyes. When you become one flesh, even when you get a divorce, you're still, in God's eyes, married. I was taught that when I was first a Christian. And that holds true until when one of the partners has sex with somebody else. So, all bets are off.

So, I have met divorced Christians, a number of them, who are praying, hoping and praying that their ex-spouse has sex with somebody. Whether it's married or not, they're committing adultery. But, as soon as they commit adultery, now you're free to get married and not commit adultery. So they're hoping and praying that will happen. I met a couple once. This dear couple loves God and love each other. They felt it was God's will for them to get married, but they weren't going to do it. They kept postponing the marriage. They've been engaged for over 3 years because the guy had been married before, and they're waiting for his ex to get married first because she would be committing adultery, and that would make him free to get remarried and not commit adultery.

What's wrong with this picture? "Dear God, please lead my ex into adultery so that I can be free to have sex and not commit adultery." It's like it presupposes a picture of God who is just obsessed with rules, you know, it's all about legal technicalities. Whoever holds out the longest wins, regardless of what's in your heart. I mean, you wouldn't mind this for 3 years. It's all about external rules. There's something very wrong with this picture. When we find ourselves in these kinds of situations, we've got to ask ourselves the question: "Maybe we're framing the issue wrong?" I think we are in a case framing it wrong. The whole way of construing things like that, we do this on almost every issue, it presupposes a sort of Court-of-Law analogy of our relationship with God that I talked about quite a bit here. Or God's the judge and we're the defendants and the whole job of salvation is to learn about and obey the legal technicalities. And wherever you have it, you're going to find people trying to maneuver around it like the couple I just told you about.

You see, in the Kingdom, that's not how they frame things. God is not our Cosmic Judge. He is our Abba-Father. He's our dad. We're not defendants, we're his kids, and our relationship with him is not about maneuvering around a bunch of legal technicalities. Our relationship with him is living in his love and being transformed, as we are saying, by the power of his love.

Now, here's what I want us to see. Jesus, in giving this teaching that we just looked at, if we look at it in the context, and now it's going to kind of look kind of tense, so start paying attention, he was not, I'm going to argue, giving legal technicalities about divorce and

remarriage. In fact, if you look at it in its original context, we can see that he was taking that whole legal-technicality framework and blowing it sky-high. All right? So let's look at this in context. It starts at Verse 3 in Matthew 19.

*"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?'"*

Here's what you need to know, the background here. The issue of divorce and remarriage was a hot legal-political topic in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Judaism. It pertained to the law of the land, so it was disputed in very heated ways, and there were basically two schools of thought.

- The Shemai school said that a man could divorce his wife only if she had committed adultery.
- The Hillel school said, no, a man could divorce his wife for any reason. Whenever he was displeased, he could divorce his wife.

And the debate raged on. It's interesting. Notice that none of them were debating on what grounds can a woman divorce a husband because women in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century couldn't divorce their husband for any reason. The man had all the power, as we talked about last week. It was a sexist culture. Aren't you glad you were not there? Now, all right. This whole debate centered on the technical interpretation of one passage in the Old Testament. It was Deuteronomy 24, and what we find in Deuteronomy 24 is this. It says:

*"... If a man marries a woman and she becomes displeasing (chen) to him because he finds something indecent (ervah) about her, he is to give (write) her a certificate of divorce."*

The trouble is that the word "displeasing," "Chen" in Greek (pronounced "hen"), what does it mean? It is translated into "displeasing," but what does that entail? Then this other word "Ervah" was even more disputed, "indecent." What does that mean? Technically speaking, is Ervah simply referring to something sexual? Is it just referring to adultery? What if your wife doesn't technically have adultery, I mean, doesn't go all the way but they go a long way? Are you justified for divorcing her for that? What if she just kisses the guy? What if she's just flirting? What exactly are the grounds that we can divorce our wives for? But maybe it's not even just being limited to sexuality. Maybe it applies to other things. The Hillel school says, "Well, the verse tells you exactly what it means. Ervah (indecent) is whatever is Chen. Whatever displeases you, that's indecent. So it is absolutely indecent for a wife not to have breakfast ready for me because it doesn't please me. It is absolutely indecent for a wife not to

boost my ego in public and flatter me. And it's indecent if the wife puts on a few extra pounds because that doesn't please me. So I'm going to get a wife who does please me, someone who's a little thinner. So I can divorce my wife for any and every reason. So the debate raged on. A lot of controversies, a lot of technicalities here, a lot of legalities here, a lot of ambiguities here. A lot to discuss.

That's what's raging in the culture, so these Pharisees are trying to lure Jesus in on this hot debate, and the reason they want to do that is because the minute they know Jesus weighs on one side or the other, then they're going to split the crowd. This is a very divisive issue, as politics usually are, and so they wanted to split his following by bringing the politics into it. It is clearly a strategy of the devil, if you want to ask me. All right. So I'll move on.

Jesus, as he always does, wisely finds a way to not be drawn into that quagmire. So this is how Jesus responds. He said:

*"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 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'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."*

So he goes back to Genesis 2, and he says, "Here's God's ideal. Here's what marriage is supposed to be. When two people come together, they enter into a one-flesh relationship. And their one-flesh relationship, their physical intimacy, represents a spiritual level." God is drawing them together, and God is joining them together so they should never be separated. They, the Pharisees, respond: (Matthew 19:7-9)

*"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning."*

Now, this is interesting. The Pharisees construed Deuteronomy 24 as a command. Jesus said, "No, he's not commanding you to divorce your wives. Moses was permitting you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard." What was commanded in Deuteronomy 24 was that if you're going to divorce your wife, tragically, well, then you need to give her a Certificate of Divorce. And the reason that was commanded was because of the woman's sake. By giving her a Certificate of Divorce, she could now prove to people that she was no longer bound by

her husband, which means she's available. It's very important in the ancient world because remaining single, unless you're independently wealthy, which very few women were, remaining single wasn't an option. There wasn't a lot of job opportunities to support yourself. You needed a man to support you. And so she was given a certificate so she can get remarried, and it slowed down the process. She had to get this legal certificate.

It's also interesting that in Deuteronomy 24, the one person she is not allowed to go back and marry again is the guy who just divorced her. And part of that, as he was telling the people, he was trying to get the guys to prevent frivolous divorces. "Think about this! When you send her out the door, as divorces were done, then you can't get her back." But it also shows this idea that you're forever married in God's eyes. Even if you're divorced, is just mistaken because she's never supposed to go back to that guy. What God has joined together should never be separated. But they can be separated, and that's what happens when we divorce.

Throughout the Bible, God honors the making of covenants, but he also honors, he's sad about it, but he also acknowledges the breaking of covenants. And so divorces do really end marriages. So that's what's going on, and this brings it all back to Genesis 2 and it then responds to their appealing to the permission of Moses. It's only after all of that that Jesus then says:

*"I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."*

Now, do you see what Jesus is doing here? There's this debate going on between these two schools of thought, the legal technicality game that they're playing trying to lure Jesus into it, and what Jesus is trying to say here is, "You're asking the wrong question." They are debating, how can we feel justified divorcing our spouses? What Jesus is saying, you can't be justified divorcing your wife. It all involves hardness of heart. Divorce involves hardness of heart. A divorce is a break from God's ideal and, therefore, divorce is sin. Sin means, in Greek, "Harmatia" (pronounced hahr-muh-TEE-yah), which means missing the mark or missing the bull's eye. Here's God's idea right here. Anything outside of that bull's eye is sin, and all divorce involves sin, so Jesus is saying, "The very fact you're having this debate shows that you have hard hearts." What you ought to be asking is how do we aspire towards God's ideal, not how can we be justified not going towards God's ideal?

Jesus is saying that there are no grounds for feeling justified getting a divorce. In fact, I submit to you, and I believe that it applies to marriages where there has been, tragically, infidelity, now you may ask what about that exception clause that Jesus gave, except for the cause of sexual

immorality? It is interesting that that exception clause that Jesus gives, except for sexual immorality, it's only found in Matthew. You don't find it in the other gospels. When they repeat Jesus' teachings, they leave that part out. Now you get to ask the question why. And many scholars believe Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience and Matthew is the most thoroughly Jewish of all the gospels. In 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish culture, men and women were, typically, betrothed to one another for a one or two-year period of time before they were officially married. Now they were legally married, but they didn't consummate the marriage until one or two years later after they got everything in order. During that time, they would undergo something like a mentoring on how to be a good husband and how to be a good wife and things of that sort. And, during that one or two-year betrothal period of time, the men and the women were allowed to call off the marriage if their fiancé was inappropriate with somebody else, usually referring to sexuality. They could call it off. After that point, they couldn't. And so, many scholars believe, Jesus is saying that there is no justified ground for divorce. Of course, there is legal divorce if there is sexual immorality in that betrothal period, but it is specifically referring to that period of time leading up to the marriage. When they call it off, it's a legal divorce, but it wasn't divorce in the full sense because they weren't married in the full sense. They weren't separating something that God has joined together.

So my own conviction is that Jesus here isn't giving us the one escape clause for a marriage. When infidelity happens, it's tragic. But if someone is justified, "Oh, I'm justified divorcing him," something else is going on. And it's like somebody else wakes up in a really great marriage and all of a sudden decides to get into an affair. Almost always, affairs are the tip of the iceberg. There are other things going on. And while it's tragic that it happens for both couples, there could be forgiveness there and a commitment to work on it. It can be sort of a notice to start paying attention to stuff, to start working on the stuff that led to the affair, and I've seen many times how God rebuilds a marriage. It takes time and trust has to be won over and all that, but we shouldn't see this as the real deal breaker. I think it's completely missing the point what Jesus is getting at here, that is, about legalities, no, I'm justified divorcing my spouse.

No. No. As long as you can work on it and the other person is going to work on it, there's no reason to call an end for that reason. But, in any case, the most important point for us to see is this: In the face of this debate, Jesus is holding up God's ideal, and the reason he is holding up God's ideal to marriage is to put an end to the legal technicalities and self-righteous game that the Pharisees are playing. And we need to understand Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage in that context. His purpose here is not to put an end to the permission in Deuteronomy 24:1. That's not his goal. His goal is to undermine the self-righteousness of the Pharisees. He's not saying that a divorced man or divorced woman cannot get remarried. In

fact, the other time when Jesus gives this teaching, he assumes, as Deuteronomy 24 does, that the woman is going to get remarried. In fact, that was what the Certificate of Divorce was for, so that she could get remarried. It was expected.

So he says this in Matthew 5:

*“But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”*

Look at this. Jesus depicts the man as forcing the woman to become an adulteress. Jesus here blames the man for it because he assumes that the woman has to get remarried. Because, as I said, unless you're independently wealthy, as hardly any Jewish woman in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine were, unless that was the case, you would have to be ending up begging in the streets or becoming a prostitute. So he assumes that the person is going to get remarried. In fact, it is interesting that Jesus doesn't draw any social implications from that teaching he just gave. He doesn't say, “Remarriage involves adultery, therefore, no one can get remarried.” He doesn't draw that conclusion. He gives that teaching in order to undermine the self-righteousness of the Pharisees. He is saying this whole technicality of this debate on divorce and remarriage is stupid because, when two people become one flesh and God joins them together, they should never be split apart.

God's ideal is for us to have one-flesh partner for all of our life – one sexual partner for all of our life. And so, if you want to play the self-righteous, legal-technicality game, then you technically ought to be measuring yourself up with God's ideal. This is what Jesus is doing with them. You ought to be technically measuring up to God's ideal. And, if you do that, then, technically speaking, all sex after the first partner is adultery. Which, if we apply it to today, means all of us hearing this message right now who have had sex with more than one person are adulterers and adulteresses. It, technically, measures against God's ideal. It all involves adultery. In fact, that's true no matter how frivolous that first sexual partner was. It applies even if you have sex with a prostitute. We find Paul doing this in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians at Corinth. It was a debaucherous city and known for its prevalence for prostitution. So there were some guys who became followers of Jesus who kept on going to the brothel house. It didn't quite get to them that it was inappropriate. So it was normal to them, that's what guys do. So Paul rebukes them in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6 by saying this, listen to this, guys: (1<sup>ST</sup> Corinthians 6:16)

*“Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, the two will become one flesh.”*

Even sex with prostitutes, which is the most frivolous kind of sex you can have, involves becoming one. It involves this union that, next to God's ideal, should never be separated. But notice that Paul doesn't draw, like Jesus, he doesn't draw any social implications from that. He doesn't say, "Okay, since you made a one-flesh relationship with that prostitute, now go back and find the last prostitute you had and marry her," which I think would be a very bad idea. But if we're playing the legal-technicality game, that's what should be done because they entered into a one-flesh relationship with these prostitutes. You see what's going on there? So, however frivolous it was, well, every time you had sex with a different person after that is adultery, technically speaking, next to God's ideal. And, if you're sitting here listening to this message and feeling kind of smug because you never did that, I never had any sex other than my spouse, or you're single and you've never had sex, you're free, and that's wonderful. But, before you start feeling smug about this, let me show you something else Jesus said.

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*

And I don't need to point out that this applies to women, as well. You see, God's ideal is not only that we would have only one sexual partner for the rest of our life, our spouse, his ideal is that we only think about having only one sexual partner for life, which would be our spouse. And any breaking from that ideal, you want to know the bull's eye, that's the bulls' eye, and anything that misses that mark, then it involves adultery in the same way. So, if you want to play the Pharisees' legal-technicality game, and you need to know that next to God's ideal we, technically, are committing adultery every time that we think of having sex with other than the person right now that we are married to, which I am pretty confident means almost everybody listening to this message is an adulterer and an adulteress. We're in this together. So, if you want to apply this socially, which, thankfully, Paul and Jesus never do, but if you're going to apply this socially, I guess you need to go back and whoever is the last person you lusted after, you should try to marry them, if you want to play the technicality game. You see, you entered into this one-flesh relationship there, at least in your mind, and I think we can all agree that would not be God's will and that would be a very bad idea.

See! When Jesus says whoever remarries commits adultery, he's not applying it socially. He's not getting a new, tighter social ethic here. He's not revoking Deuteronomy 24, and he's not saying divorced people can't get remarried. He's simply holding up God's ideal, the bull's eye, to expose the hypocrisy of these Pharisees' self-righteous legal-technicality game. He's blowing that whole framework sky-high saying, "You can't feel righteous about this. You can't feel justified about this. You're debating the wrong issue." And doing that, as Jesus so often

does, he is showing us that we are all sinners, that we all have fallen minds and fallen hearts, that we are all far removed from God's ideal, and that we all need a savior. We're all in need of God's grace.

So, brothers and sisters, it's like this. If God is the cosmic judge, the legal-technicality kind of judge, and if we're defendants whose job it is to learn and obey these legal technicalities, if salvation is a matter of being congruent with all the technicalities of the bull's eye, God's ideal, if that's what salvation is, then I submit to you, we are all toast. We are all gone. We're doomed. We're condemned. We're destined for hell and there is no hope for us if that's the way God is and that's the way salvation is. Because the reality is: We're far removed from that ideal. Not just on a score of sexuality but also on a lot of things. But that's why we have to give thanks, as we were singing earlier, because that's not how God is. God's not our cosmic judge. Praise God! God is our Abba-Father. He's our beloved Father, and we're not defendants in the court of law. We're his beloved children. And the Kingdom is not a court-of-law. The Kingdom is a family born from above, with Abba-Father and brothers and sisters here. And our relationship with Abba-Father isn't about tripping through a landmine of legal technicalities, you know, just trying to do what is right to God and one another. It's about receiving and reflecting the love of God shown in Jesus Christ, loving one another as Christ has loved us. It's about receiving his grace and receiving the power of his love that transforms us from the inside out. It's about reflecting the character of Christ. See, Jesus Christ came not to inaugurate another set of ethical rules that tighten the belt on the Old Testament. No! No! He came to inaugurate a Kingdom where we receive the light of God into our inner being and be transformed from the inside out.

The Law tried to transform people from the outside in, if you do it right, that might change you. But, you see, that didn't work. In fact, that's why God gave us the New Testament, to show us that we can never relate to God on that basis. That's how the Law drives us to Christ. Paul says in Galatians 3:

*"Jesus came to inaugurate a Kingdom that's rooted in the grace of God, not a grace that is stupid and licensed to sin."*

No! It's a grace that transforms us through the power of his character and a desire to seek first the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is not a matter of these technicalities. It's about the grace of God, a grace that meets us where we're at. However far we are from the ideal, it meets us there and moves us forward to be transformed in ways where we can now begin to live in a way that honors Abba-Father. It is the grace of God that allows us to get married even though you thought about sex or had sex before then. Technically, that involves adultery. It is

the grace of God, the same grace of God, for the same reason that allows people who have been married then divorced to get remarried. It's the grace of God. If this is a legal-technicality game, then we'll be frozen. We just have to go back to the person we lusted after or had sex with, and if we can't do that, then we're dead.

God meets us where we're at, right here, right now. Whatever happened in the past doesn't matter. He meets us right here where we're at and moves us forward. Because it's all the grace of God, you can't feel righteous about it. And none of us can look down on somebody else. You can't feel righteous because you stayed married while someone else got divorced. You can't feel righteous because you divorced and stayed divorced instead of getting remarried while someone else got remarried. That whole way of thinking is just anti-Kingdom. It's all through God's grace, so we can't feel justified or righteous about it. But we also shouldn't feel condemned wherever we're at, because it's all the grace of God. And so because God's grace that allows us to get married. Don't condemn getting remarried. Divorce happens, and it's tragic, but don't live in condemnation because of that. You shouldn't feel condemned that you get remarried. It's about the Kingdom and God's grace and the power of his transforming love which brings an end to a whole legality-way of thinking. It beautifully reframes everything.

So whether we're single listening to this or divorced or remarried, all that matters is that we're living in the power of that transforming love. And that we're kids whose only allegiance is to Abba-Father who are living in ways that bring honor to him. Whether that means staying single and getting married or being divorced and getting remarried, do it to honor him in ways that carry out his will in heaven to expand the Kingdom of God and advance the Kingdom of God. Praise God. Praise God! The Kingdom's radical. It's beautiful.

Now I want to close in prayer, and I want the prayer teams to come forward. If you are here this morning and have any need whatsoever, a marriage issue, a remarriage issue, a divorce issue, whatever, or maybe you've got a headache, come forward and talk to these folks and let them pray for you. Everything you share is held in confidence. And don't forget to pick up some of the treats that are out there to support our Missions Team

Abba-Father, as your children, we leave here with a heart that will be dedicated to bringing honor to your will and advancing your Kingdom. God, let your grace invade our lives wherever we're at and give us your wisdom and how our next step is supposed to be. And keep us forever free from the legal-technicality, self-righteous game. Keep us, Lord God, as having a perspective that is living in your grace, not as a license to sin but a power to love. In your name we pray, and all of God's kids said, Amen!!

God bless you guys. Go and advance the Kingdom!