

Mark - Is It Lawful for a Man to Divorce His Wife?

by J. Glyn Owen

Jesus answers the Pharisees' question about divorce by showing that it was not part of God's original purpose and plan, but rather a provision made by Moses due to the hardness of human hearts.

Duration: 59:56

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Mark 10:1-45

Topics: "Divorce"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the current state of marriage and how God's purpose for it is being undermined. He shares examples of broken marriages and the consequences that result from disregarding God's design for marriage. The preacher emphasizes the importance of not causing harm to others, especially the 'little ones' in the eyes of Jesus. He also highlights the significance of the union between a man and a woman, stating that it is not just a sexual union but a total union that encompasses all aspects of life. The sermon concludes with the preacher acknowledging the difficulty of addressing this topic but emphasizing the need to faithfully teach and preach the entirety of God's Word.

Transcript

Now, will you kindly turn with me in the Gospel recorded by St. Mark to chapter 10, and we are going to meditate a while, as we've already indicated, upon the passage from the first verse over the twelfth. And we have entitled our study, Is it Lawful for a Man to Divorce His Wife? Taking the words, of course, as you will notice full well, from the second verse. I normally come with fear and trembling to stand in this pulpit, whether you recognize it or not.

If you could see my knees oftentimes, there's quite a vibration here in the pulpit. But I can assure you that I do so very especially today. And I guess this is a subject that every preacher, every teacher of the Word would evade, if one were not previously committed to expound the whole of the Word of God, as it is given us in Scripture.

And the only thing that brings us here today is the fact that this is our next subject. As we plow through Mark's Gospel, we have come to this subject. And believing that all Scripture is written for our profit, we therefore have to come and address ourselves to it.

Let me say one other thing by way of introduction. What we are going to do this morning is this. We're going to try and see what our Lord really said.

And should there be, as doubtless there will, should there be those among us who feel, well, now I'm hopelessly out of the way. I've really sinned, and I've transgressed, and I've broken God's law. I want to remind you at the very beginning that our Lord is the one who heals the broken heart, and who receives the penitent, and who delights in genuine mercy toward the penitent, so that even though there may be aspects of the subject that will necessarily hurt, the hurt is with a view to healing.

And if we can receive that as from the lips of the Son of God, I believe that all of us, all of us will profit from what Jesus has to say in this passage. Perhaps I ought to add one other thing. There may be some of you who would be tempted to say, well, now this doesn't apply to me at all.

It's got nothing at all to say to me. I'm a single fellow or a single girl, and I don't even contemplate marriage. I've got plenty of troubles already.

And you tend to sit a little bit aloof. Well, now don't be selfish. If you are in that happy or unhappy situation, whichever you'd like to say it is, and you're a Christian man or a Christian woman, you live in a world of so much travel and disaster in this field.

And if you are to be the servant of the living God, you need to know what God has to say to this situation. And if you don't know it, you can't help. Therefore, let us come this morning not as preachers looking down upon people, most certainly, and I trust that there is none of us in the pew looking down metaphorically upon anyone else whom we know has had difficulties in this field.

Let us not come in that way. Let us come as sinners, all of us. If not evidently transgressors in this particular field, nevertheless sinners in the sight of God.

And as sinners, with due humility, let us dare to try to consider what the Lord is saying to us here and saying to His church of all times. Now, in coming to that, there's one thing I just simply have time to refer to. It's very important, and later on we shall have to refer back to it.

It is important for an understanding of the background to much that our Lord says in chapter 10, 11, and chapter 12. You notice that our Lord withdraws here from Galilee in the north, and He goes down to Judea in the south, and that is to the east of Jordan, to Perea. Now, this is very important.

Galilee had been the sphere of our Lord's boyhood. With all its excitement and all its hope and anticipations, He had lived in Galilee as a boy, and Galilee had a tremendous place, evidently, in His affection. It was here that He heard the voice of God to launch out into His public ministry.

It was here that He began. It was from here that He called His disciples, and so many of His early miracles of one kind or another were performed right up in the north, in Galilee. Now, He turns His back upon Galilee, moves down towards the south, crosses to the east of Jordan, and then from Perea, He is ultimately going to make His way into Judea proper, where He is, as He has foretold, so often going to lay down His life for ransom for men.

It's a very important fact to remember in order to get the proper context and setting for what is taught later on in the chapter. Now, there are Pharisees in the south as well as in the north. The subject that I have before me this morning is not a subject for jokes, and I don't want to appear to be the purveyor of liberty,

yet I can't help telling you this of the old bishop in England who received a request from a vicar that he'd be removed into a new diocese.

The vicar asked him, Why are you so anxious? Well, he said, There's a Mrs. Jones in this parish where I am. There was a Mrs. Jones in another parish, and they're the bane of my life. And the bishop replied, Well, he says, I have a Mrs. Jones in every parish and every diocese.

You know, it is true, there are difficult people. Jesus had encountered the Pharisees in the north. I don't need to recount the details now.

They were always at His heels. They were always there, ready to trip, to trap, to accuse, to do anything they conceivably could, to bring a cloud over the name, the good name of the Son of God, to cease or to attempt to bring an end to His ministry, a premature end. Jesus was right down the south of the country, and lo and behold, His first congregation involves Pharisees again.

The devil has a remarkable way of inspiring his followers. They never stop. They never tire.

Mark places our text soon after the reference to Jesus, you notice, the reference by Jesus to the sheer tragedy resulting from anyone causing the least of His little ones to trip or to sin. Now, you remember this without my going back to it and reminding you of the details. The main point was Jesus dared to say to His disciples, No, He said, If you or anyone else cause one of the least of My little ones to trip, it would be better for that person, for you or whoever it may be, it would be better for that person if he had never been born.

In fact, if something very heavy had been tied around his neck and he'd been cast into the depths of the sea, you can't play fast and loose with My little ones. However little they may be, however insignificant they may be, they count to Me. But now notice, Satan and his hordes, the Pharisees at this point, are bent on bringing damage and tripping, and the word to trip is brought out here.

They ask a question to trip not the least of the children of God, but the loftiest, the very Son of God Himself. They hope to trip Him, to cause Him to say something that would be self-indicting in order that they might have some basis for a serious charge against Him and thereby get rid of Him, get Him into prison if not something over and above that. Now against that background, let's come to the passage.

The first thing I want you to notice is the question posed by the Pharisees. It's the question that we've taken as a title of our sermon this morning. Some Pharisees came and tested Him.

That's the word, tried to trip Him, tested Him. They tested Him by asking, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? Divorce is the term we normally use to describe the severance of the bond or contract inherent in marriage, with the result that following divorce, both parties involved in such dissolution of their marriage are thereafter legally described as unmarried, as single people, and are therefore, of course, legally open to be married again. Now the question before us is this, is what was socially legal morally justifiable? Now before we come to answer that question, I think one need say a word about the prevalence of divorce in biblical times.

I've been reading through the Old Testament again. I've spent so much time on my back the last ten days that I've been able to read a little extra, and one has to thank God for, I was going to say, small mercies. At any rate, this has been one of the privileges of having something wrong with the back.

Now I've been amazed as to the number of times we have some sort of a bleak reference in the Old Testament to what is probably divorce, though it is not brought out clearly and in so many words. However, sheer honesty requires of us to note the fact that it was very, very prevalent in our Lord's day, and I want you to notice this particularly. Such is the sheer honesty and historical veracity of Scripture that it not only tells us that Moses had to make some urgent some urgent means to curb an awful wave of evil in his day whereby men were getting rid of their wives, but the same Scriptures tell us that of all people, the first man to divorce his wife, according to the Scriptures, was none other than the saintly Abram.

Now this is something that took me by surprise as I was reading the evidence again this week. We read in Exodus, in Genesis chapter 16, that due to certain circumstances in the home, you remember them, you'll be familiar with them, Sarai gave her Egyptian maid Hagar to Abram to be his wife, not a concubine, to be his wife. This is a different usage altogether.

You have concubinage in Scripture, you have concubines, that's not what we have here. She gave Hagar to be the wife. But polygamy is never blessed in Scripture.

Scripture does not say in so many words you should not have a polygamous arrangement, but wherever we encounter polygamy in Scripture, it seems always to be under a cloud and to lead to trouble. Well now, here we have the case of Hagar. Hagar has given birth to a boy, and things get so difficult in the home that finally Sarai, who is still the real mistress, real, still number one, and she must have had a fairly strong arm, she goes to Abram and she almost reads the riot act to him and she says, you've got to get rid of this other woman, and you've got to get rid of her son.

And Abram gets rid of Hagar, his wife, not his concubine. And Abram gets rid of her and opens the door of the tent and tells her and Ishmael, out. And that's the first case of divorce, divorce without a parchment.

Now by the time of Jesus, things were certainly no better than in the days of Moses, so that viewed superficially, the question asked by the Pharisees deserved asking, is it right or is it wrong? It could well have been expressed with the loftiest motives in view, as a matter of fact, however, as we've already indicated, that was not the case here. It was asked with subtle cunning in the hope of causing Jesus to trip and, as we've noticed, to incriminate himself so that they could have a charge against him and somehow or other silence his testimony. Have you noticed the problem here? You see, if Jesus answered the question that was posed to him, either way he would be in trouble.

It was a very cunning question. It was well devised by his enemies and the enemies of Christ can be very cunning. If Jesus answered to the effect that divorce was divinely permissible, he might well be open to the charge of being an evil, lewd person.

You remember they were already saying about him that he was the friend of publicans and sinners, and that had certain innuendos. They were already calling him a wine bibber, a gluttonous man, and the folk who were already fabricating such charges against the Lord Jesus would have been delighted if only they could add to this again that he was living a loose sort of a life or that he was associating with those who propagated such principles or absence of principles. When Moses gave permission for people to divorce their wives, husbands to divorce their wives in that case, he used two Hebrew words, *erwoth tavar*.

Now evidently the people of Moses' day knew exactly, knew precisely what those words implied. Over the years of time, however, they've become a little bit blurred, and we are not absolutely sure what they mean. Certainly they were not absolutely sure what they meant in the days of our Lord.

The Jews were not sure, not simply Gentiles reading Hebrew, but the Jews themselves were not sure. So that you had a person like the famous Rabbi Hillel who said that those terms included anything that was significantly wrong with a wife. And he went on to say that if a man discovers anything significantly wrong with his wife, well then he's just got the right to get rid of her.

Now I'm not I'm not quoting from Aesop's fables. I'm giving you the exact facts. Let me quote.

The husband could reject his wife if she accidentally served him food that had been slightly burned. I don't know how many of us would be together if we went on at this rate. But anyway, we better leave that there.

Accidentally burned, or if at home she talked so loud that the neighbors could hear her. Or let me give you another quote from Hillel. If she cooked her husband's food ill by over-salting it or over-roasting it.

Now these are some of the abstruse quotations, but these are quotations. All of which goes to say, you see, that there was a very liberal way of looking at the whole thing. And divorce was permissible if you had done any of these things.

Those who elsewhere are recorded as falsely referring to our Lord as a gluttonous man, then, in the language we refer to, they would have been very, very happy to hear him say, oh, I believe that divorce is possible. And they would have said about him, he too is with the out-of-the-way Hillel. He's one of them.

He's one of the loose ones. One of the liberal ones. We don't listen to him.

But think of the other alternative. If on the other hand, Jesus said that divorce was not divinely permissible, he would not only upset some important, high-ranking Jews who were divorced, but he could very well also arouse the ire of King Herod. And he's near to his territory at the moment when this took place.

Now you remember that this is the Herod that took the head of John the Baptist. This is the Herod that slew John the Baptist because John the Baptist was courageous enough to go and face him with the issue and say to him that it was not right for him to live with his brother's wife. So you see, if Jesus said divorce is not permissible, my, you can easily imagine the kind of trouble into which he's going to get himself.

They might even say, look, you don't even agree with Moses because Moses allowed divorce under certain circumstances. So looking at it from this point of view, whether Jesus says this or whether he says that, he's in for trouble. Hallelujah! Our Lord was never in trouble.

But he was put with his back against the wall in this particular situation. But watch him get out of it. The answer given by Jesus.

First of all, the question he counterposed. Jesus asked the excited Pharisees. Now notice the question because its very simplicity blinds you.

What did Moses command you? Verse 3. What did Moses command you? Now, if it is correct to speak of the incarnate Lord in this way, I would like to say that here surely is the greatest streak of genius ever. Now, I don't know whether it is right to speak of our Lord in those terms, but if it is, I would like to say that. Because do you see what he does? They were bringing up before him the two outstanding scholars of the day.

I didn't mention Shammai who was the very conservative one. Hillel was the liberal, Shammai was the other, the conservative. And Jesus takes no notice of either Hillel or Shammai, you see.

It is as if we have a discussion on theological matters. And you have the very liberal on the one side and the very conservative on the other. And here are folk arguing and getting hot under the collar, which school do you belong to? Which theologian do you follow? And here comes the master and he takes no notice of either of them.

And he gets behind them and he says, What did Moses say? I'm neither interested in Hillel nor Shammai. What were they anyway but feeble, frail men. But Moses was a different man altogether.

What did Moses command you? And he doesn't stop there. But that's the first point where he lands in his reasoning. What did Moses say? Let's get back to the lawgiver.

Let's get back to the divine revelation. Let's get back to the scriptures. That's the thing that really matters.

Now look at the answers he corrected. They said Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away. He corrects that.

It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law, Jesus replied. Now have you got it? They said Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away. All right, says Jesus.

It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law. These Pharisees might have thought that they could easily put Jesus in disarray, if not bring him to total silence by countering his previous statement with the reminder that Moses had at any rate given permission for people to divorce their wives. But they were mistaken.

Jesus went on to say that Moses' provision was something necessitated by the sheer momentum of human perversity. And that it was no part of God's original purpose and plan at all. It arose out of the sheer perversity of the human heart.

You see what the Lord is saying is this. Look, he says, do you know why Moses did that? Moses did it all right, and Moses' authority is greater than that of Hillel and Shammai. And Moses did that.

Do you know why he did it? It was because of the hardness of the hearts of men. So that you have men who have taken women to be their wives, pledged their truth to them, entered into covenant with them. Together they have brought children into the world, and they've nursed them up, and they've had a family going.

And then despite all that, a man in the hardness of his heart will quietly turn around to his wife that was, and say, look, I've had enough of you. I've got somebody else. And go through the whole business, two, three, four times, as if he had a heart of, shall I say, stone.

Now, says our Lord, explaining why Moses demanded a bill of divorcement, but allowed divorce. Now he says, Moses did that because of the hardness of your hearts. The situation was so evil, he says, Moses had to do something to curb it.

Moses has never got very much thanks for this. I've never seen it referred to in any of the books that I've read in the Old Testament, or anywhere else for that matter. Moses is here, my friends, let me say it, if no one else will.

Moses is here standing as the champion of the woman in trouble in marriage. Moses, the lawgiver, is the man with a big heart who will not allow hard-hearted men to get rid of their wives any old how without

giving them a bill of divorce specifying the cause, lest an evil false charge should be brought against them later. And that's Moses.

There's grace at the heart of the law, and certainly in the heart of the lawgiver. But now, look at this. Jesus goes on.

For this reason, he says, 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 not man put asunder.

Verses seven to nine. Look at what has happened. Having brushed the liberal and the conservative moralists aside, Jesus then went back to Moses for direction.

He explained why Moses acted as he did, but he didn't leave it there. Then he takes another leap back from the book of Exodus into the book of Genesis. And he turns to these Pharisees and he says, now look, that's what Moses had to do because of the hardness of your heart.

But the original purpose of God for marriage did not have divorce in it at all. He goes back, you see, one stage further, and he goes back and he wants us to see what marriage was meant to be in the Creator's mind and in the Creator's heart. And in the light of that, to consider the question that the Pharisees have put to him.

Now, what then was God's purpose for marriage? What does Genesis 2, 18 to 24, especially that last crucial verse, verse 24, what does that passage and that verse, what do they tell us about God's original and God's unchanging intention for marriage, what is it? Can I mention three things? First of all, we are told there that God made Adam and Eve and he made them male and female. Now, there is the first basic principle. God made man, that is man and wife, with a view to marriage and with a view to the sexual life which is involved in marriage and in the marriage union.

He made us as he has made us because he had in view that we should be married, one man to one wife. Now, marriage is not something that has been suggested by a modern group of psychologists or scholars or what have you. Marriage was ordained by God and because marriage ordained it, he made us physically, physiologically and psychologically and otherwise with this in mind.

And that's the biblical teaching. He made us for each other by their very constitution. Man and wife were designed the one for the other.

That's the biblical teaching. Secondly, marriage involves a union of two people, one male and one female, and within the bonds of marriage, they henceforth cease to be the two individual people they were in the sense in which they were individuals. And they now become, as scripture tells us, one flesh.

Now, this is God's purpose now. We're talking about the purpose of God. The two shall come together and they shall become one flesh or as C.S. Lewis puts it, he insists that in modern language it should be one organism.

One organism. Lewis insists that that statement is no exception, sorry, no expression of a mere sentiment or a mere hope, but rather that it describes a deep and abiding fact. Let me quote from him.

Just as one is stating a fact when one says that a lock and its key are one mechanism, or that a violin and a bow are one musical instrument, the inventor of the human machine was telling us that its two halves, the male and the female, were made to be combined together in pairs, not simply on the sexual level, but totally. The monstrosity of sexual intercourse outside of marriage is that those who indulge in it are trying to isolate that kind of union from all other kinds of union which were intended to go along with it and make up the total union. And they became one flesh, one indeed in the sense in which they now belong to one another as two halves of one.

Now that's the biblical pattern. In order to experience this new life union, the person's concern must be mature enough. First of all, to leave father and mother.

Now, I have spoken to many people concerning marriage, and I'm not telling tales out of school, but I would have to say if I were asked the question, though they may have been well on in years, I mean well beyond the borderline, they were not mature enough to leave father and mother. They were still very much babes in arms and were not able to assume the responsibility of fitting into this new relationship where two individuals are to be made one, and they've got to learn to become one in mind, in heart, in purpose, in spirit, and in the whole length and breadth and gamut of the inner and the outer life of living together. Scripture puts it like this.

There is this threefold aspect. We must learn to cleave. We must be strong enough to, sorry, to leave father and mother in order to cleave to the partner that God has given us.

And we cleave to the partner that God has given us because God has joined us together. Now, I can't dwell upon those three concepts this morning. I leave them with you.

Each one of them is important. You must be prepared to leave in one sense. Up until now, the most sacred bond in life is that that binds me to my father and mother.

From this point forward, the most sacred bond in life is not that. It's the fact that I am one flesh. I am one with the one other person of the opposite sex that God has given me and to whom, notice, he has joined me.

It's not someone to whom I've simply joined myself. It's not someone that simply tagged on to me and got hold of my arm and said, I'll be your partner. No, no, no, no.

There is a divine joining here. One of the old saints used to speak of the divine joinery. Well, that's very graphic, but there it is.

In real marriage, God is doing something. Now, you see, the moment you've said that, you've answered the question of our text. Is it legitimate for a man to put away his wife? Well, now look, if you're going to put away your wife, you're going to put away somebody that God has joined to you.

It means working against everything that God has done. It means setting the whole machinery in reverse. You're going right against the whole plan and pattern and movement of God.

You know, there are many dear people that have never seen this and have unwittingly become involved in a movement of violating the commandments of God and going headlong against what God has purposed. Now, you'll forgive me, I must take a few moments because I want to be practical here at the close. There are many things that have to be left, that have been left unsaid, and I'll be very happy to meet individuals

who may have questions.

You can't deal with a subject like this all at once. God's ideal, God's purpose, is not being fulfilled in every married life. I'm putting it mildly, am I not? There is a breakdown in marriage.

Ah, well, there we are. I don't need to add very much there. We, therefore, should never tire of presenting to our own children, those of us that have children, to our own children at home and to those who come to church for instruction, that which is God's revealed plan for the sexuality with which he has endowed us and especially for marriage.

We, as Christian parents and Christian educators, are largely to blame, I believe, for many of the moral pitfalls into which our young people unwittingly fall, because we certainly have not presented the biblical teaching about sex and marriage with a clarity, consistency, and compassion and care that we should. And whether we like it or not, there are many people, perhaps belonging to some of us here this morning, and they're in dire trouble in this field, and really the finger points not first of all at them but at us. May God have mercy upon us.

Neither, for that matter, have we involved ourselves in the same kind of duty towards those who are called to live a single life, but that's not my subject this morning. God's clear purpose for marriage is being thwarted, broken, and frustrated, then, in many lives, and many are getting rid of their partners, sometimes for the most minimal of reasons. Some, in all innocence, have been caught in the meshes of a soul-destroying entanglement for which they were totally unprepared.

I was talking recently to a girl who went to a party from a Christian home, an evangelical home. She'd never drunk any wine before. The first sip of wine made her quite tipsy, and the boy came along, and she was pregnant.

Well, what is she going to do? And that's the way it started, but that's not the way it ended. And one could go on repeating over and over and over and over again some variation of that kind of thing. Others have simply been thoughtless.

They just haven't given as much thought to this as they give to other aspects of life. They're very clever in mathematics, or in the knowledge of history, or science, or what have you, but they've never thought about these things. They've never thought these things through.

So that a question that haunts many people today is this. Is there nothing in our day and age that matches the mosaic legislation permitting divorce on certain conditions in the face of such continued hardness of heart as makes life, as someone has put it, still very unlivable for very many people? Facing this oftentimes poignant plea, however, however it is precisely expressed, we too must be careful, lest our very laudable desire to help our hard-pressed friends involves us in becoming more devoted to the notions of the various human schools of thought here, be it Shammai or Hillel, than to present the biblical blueprint. We must present God's Word with God's grace and with the compassion of the Savior.

That blueprint must remain our ideal for ourselves, for our children, for our church, for our society, because God has given no other. We have no mandate to set a lower standard for any man. This is supported by the testimony of Scripture to the effect that, have you noticed this, how in many places of Scripture women folk are told what they must suffer.

It happens to be women in the two main cases that I'm thinking of at the moment. What they must suffer rather than allow the marriage to break up. Therefore, those who take this as a matter of course that you can break it up if it doesn't work, they simply are running contrary to the known, the revealed will of God.

But now, there is one phrase used by our Lord in two places in the New Testament, and there is something else which is said by the Apostle Paul in another place, which has given a large section of godly scholars and commentators basis for believing that there is one solitary basis whereby a man or a woman can legitimately divorce his partner. Now, those words or that term, that phrase comes up in two places. In Matthew chapter 5 verses 31 and 32, and then in Matthew 19 and 9. Let me read them to you.

It has been said, anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce. But I tell you that any woman who divorces her wife, except for, and the NIV translates, marital unfaithfulness, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a woman so divorced commits adultery.

Then Matthew 19 and 9. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife except for marital unfaithfulness, it's one Greek word, *pornaia*, and marries another commits adultery. Now, if it be asked why this one factor, call it unchastity or call it adultery, why this one factor, whichever the term may signify, allows the breaking of the marriage bond, you really raise a very big question. The whole thesis of my message this morning has been to say that in the original purpose of God, divorce was never envisaged.

So that what God has joined together let no man put to thunder. How now then can we make sense of our Lord under any conceivable circumstances, saying that there is one thing, this thing called *pornaia*, that is possibly a valid basis for divorce. Now let me stress this.

The Lord Jesus did not say that if this thing *pornaia* takes place, then you necessarily divorce your partner. The partner guilty of *pornaia*, unchastity, adultery, whatever it was, may repent. And we should pray for this, and we should seek for this, and if he or she repents, then we should meet that repentance with forgiveness, just as the book of the prophet Hosea teaches us.

But you and I know full well, and we must be realistic enough to face the fact that in this world of ours, very often one taste of immorality leads to greater immorality and more and more involvement, so that men become slaves. And there is no such thing as repentance. And so it becomes a fixed mode and manner of living.

What then? On what basis can we say that this one thing can be a valid basis for divorce? Well, those who believe that this is the right interpretation of the New Testament say that it is because of the very nature of marriage itself. We spent a little time, and I'm drawing to a close. I thank you for your gracious listening.

I'm sure I'm longer than I usually am. Don't look. We were talking about marriage being the joining together of two people by God.

But it is not simply a divine action in which God alone is involved, though God is involved. Then the two shall come together, and intercourse between man and wife within marriage is a kind of symbolic outward seal of that which has already taken place in the depths. Now, it is the understanding of those who believe that what we have here is a valid basis for divorce, that this is the one thing that breaks the knot that God has made.

That adultery, when my partner, God forbid, but when my partner turns to someone else and has sexual intercourse with that person, the bond that sealed her to me is broken, and there is a gaping wound in our

relationship. And it is something that only the grace of God can heal. And if it goes on and on, and there is no repentance, then on the basis of that, the two will become so separated, not only in body but in spirit, that the marriage has virtually become a dead thing.

And to live together under those circumstances is something that brings honor to neither God nor man, neither to the parties themselves and certainly not to any children that there may be to the couple. Now, I'm drawing to a close. I am both challenged to the depths and yet comforted.

It's a strange thing. I was shaken to the core when I read and discovered it for myself that it was Abram that is first mentioned in Scripture as divorcing his wife, particularly because Abram should have done it at that stage, when he was so bent on pleasing God he was waiting the child of promise. Oh, I know the child of promise was long coming.

I know it was a difficult time, but Abram, Abram, Abram. And yet, you know, when that confusion of mind and thought had worked its way upon my soul, I began to smile with a smile of hope and I began to say to myself, isn't it wonderful? Terrible though the sin may be, it is forgivable. It is not the unforgivable sin.

And it is possible for a man who has divorced his wife and sent her out into the cold with a young boy of 12 years of age or so and made no real provision for her, at least for any length of time, it is possible for a man who has done that to rise in the will of God again until he becomes called the friend of God and the father of the faithful. It is possible. And I want to leave that with you this morning.

You may have made an awful blunder in this, and you are aware of it as I'm feebly trying to expound this very big theme which is too big for me. And listen, my dear friend, acknowledge the wrong of it. Tell God about it.

But tell him as the God of Abram that you look to him and you ask him and you urge him and you, you cry to him for the death of your soul to come and enable you to start climbing again, that you too may become the father of the faithful. That's tremendous, you see. The father of the faithful.

He was called the father of the faithful. In other words, after this, though he was faithless here, he proved himself to be a man of faith. There was such a complete reversal, such a complete transformation, and so may there be in your life and mine.

There is one other word of application. My friends, we need to talk to one another a little more about these things in this sense. First of all, we should take pains to teach our children the meaning of marriage as well as to exemplify in the home what it means.

Now, those of you who are married men and women here this morning, let's take this to heart. And don't let anyone go into a home and disrupt marriage. If there is somebody here who finds that you disrupt one member in the party, for God's sake and for your soul's sake, run a mile.

Marriage is something in the sight of God which is not only honorable but sacred. Don't let anything intrude. Nothing you say, nothing you do cause a man to lose confidence in his wife or a wife lose confidence in her husband.

But more than that, we should welcome the penitent divorcee or divorced like any other penitent into the fellowship of the Christian church. Oh, I would like to feel this morning that the community of God's people here in Knox is a therapeutic community where those who've been wounded, and if you don't know it

already, you should know it from today forward, there are hardly any wounds that are deeper and more difficult to bear than the wounds that issue from divorce. But if there is one place on earth which ought to be therapeutic and rehabilitative, it's the place where the redeemed of the Lord are, where men and women worship, who have the Spirit of God and the Christ of God in their hearts.

You see, our arms should be wide open, and we have no right to look at each other and say, your sin is worse than mine. Jesus never gives us the least reason to believe that physical sins are worse than the sins of the Spirit. It's the other way around.

That's the proud man and the arrogant that he cast against them all. We should receive one another in our Lord Jesus Christ and help build one another up, and not talk about one another, but pray for one another and bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Now, we as a church do have a number of ministries, one currently, marriage enrichment course going on on the Sunday morning at 9.45. Some of you perhaps ought to be taking that, and you're a little bit timid in going.

You're wondering what people will think of you, seeing you there. They think that there's something wrong. Let them think.

It's more important that you and I should grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ than trifle or think of what people may say of us. I apologize really this morning for the length of this, but I know you will agree with me that we are dealing with something which is exceedingly important, and I covet your prayers, that nothing I may have said will have obliterated the main truth that in God's original intention, divorce was never contemplated. And if it is permissible at all, it is permissible only on this one score, and that is still to say it is because of the hardness of men's hearts.

Now let us commit one another to the Lord. Our Heavenly Father, we acknowledge our weaknesses and our faults to you in Jesus' name. There are too many to confess, and certainly to enumerate one by one in your presence at the close of our morning worship today.

But we come and we ask that you will graciously help us and direct us not simply to be personally beyond reproach in these matters, but to be able to help others also. And if we ourselves have made a blunder and have fallen in this respect, pick us up again. Keep Satan from thundering in our ears that it is impossible for us to start again.

Remind us of Abraham. You've shown us what you could do in the life of a David who committed adultery. Thank you for showing us what you could do in the life of an Abraham who divorced his wife.

Our Lord, we take these things as our encouragement, and we pray that you will use them and employ them to the glory of your name. Should there be among us this morning any who have particularly poignant problems of this order, we lovingly and in Jesus' name pray that you will enable them wisely and with courage to resolve the issue in a manner that is pleasing to yourself. And all this we ask in the name of our Lord.

Amen.

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