

The Root of the Problem



Matthew 5:31–32
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By way of introduction, let me remind you again that as we walk through this sermon what I am going to say this morning, to a certain degree stands on its own, but it's based on what Jesus has already said earlier in this message. Jesus knows that within that large group of people, there are going to be a few, some, who are going to become followers, not just be fans. He shares with them that as they follow Him, they are going to experience a life of human flourishing, not as a human doer, but as a human being. In this life filled with sin where there is a ruler who is against our God, there are just going to be some characteristics about their lives, and our lives, that are going to cause them and us to still flourish. As we live this life of flourishing, God is going to use us to be salt and light in the community in which we live.

Now, in order for us to be the salt and light that He wants us to be, He wants us to understand that the righteousness we are going to have is going to exceed that of the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. And then, He puts that ultimate challenge before us—for us to understand that in our walk with God, God wants us to be perfect as He is perfect. We

come to understand that word, perfect, basically means that God wants us to reach our intended goal. He wants us to fulfill the purpose to which He has called us. And so in this fifth chapter, He has given us six examples of how the righteousness of those who follow Him is greater than the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. We have already looked at the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. They felt like if they were not actually committing murder, they were righteous. They felt like if they were not actually committing the act of adultery, they were not breaking the command and they were righteous. But then, Jesus reveals to us that the righteousness He is talking about is not outer conformity to the Law; it's inner conformity to the Law Giver. So we are not going to just carry out the letter of the Law, we are going to experience the very spirit of the Law, and because we are right in our relationship with Him, we are going to be right in our relationships with others. This morning, Jesus is going to lead us to talk about marriage.

Scripture

"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Last week, I toyed with the thought of whether verses 31–32 go with the preceding verses 27–30. After much study this week, I am convinced that, as I was last week, this is a separate example of righteousness that Jesus wants us in the church to strive for. I do believe it's similar and builds on the passage before about a man lusting in his heart for a woman. Can you imagine a group of people believing they were right with God based on the fact that they were not committing adultery, physically? They had never had a sexual relation with another lady because they were in a married relationship. Yet Jesus says He wants a righteousness that exceeds that. He wants a righteousness that's not just conformity to the Law when the Law says thou shalt not commit adultery. He wants a righteousness that flows from within you that is based on your relationship with Him. Therefore, Jesus says if you, a man, looks at a woman lustfully, with intent

of lusting for her, desiring her, you have already committed adultery in your heart. Jesus says that sin is so dangerous that if the problem causing you to lust for somebody is your eye, you need to gouge it out. If your right hand is your problem, you need to cut it off. It would actually be better for a person to go through life without a dominant eye or a dominant hand than to spend eternity separated from God forever in a lake of fire. I felt the weight of that last week. Tell me you felt the weight to that. Jesus not only doesn't want us to commit adultery, He didn't even want us looking at another person who is not our spouse with the intent of getting some kind of gratification out of that look!

This week, He is going to build on that. See, as best as I can understand the passage we have read, Jesus not only wants His followers not to commit adultery; He doesn't want us to cause others to commit adultery. He said it's been said if a man divorces his wife, give her a bill of divorcement. Now, in Jewish society you didn't go to court if you wanted to dissolve your marriage. If you were a Jewish man (now a Jewish woman could not do this but a Jewish man could), you could decide to divorce your wife. Once he had made the decision to divorce her, he took a writing instrument, wrote out his desire to divorce his wife telling her why he was divorcing her, giving her specific examples and then state, 'I am releasing you from our covenant of marriage, you are now free from me.' He would take that piece of paper and he would find his wife. He would take two people with him to witness and then he would put that in her hand. She would then read that, and upon reading that, they were divorced. Now, if you were a lady, you could divorce your husband but you had to go through the law court and that was very, very, very, very difficult. So basically, women in Jewish culture did not have the right to divorce, only the men. So get this picture...If a man decided he no longer want to live with his wife, he believed he was perfectly right if he just wrote out on a piece of paper with what he didn't like about his wife, had two people witness it, he put it in her hand, and she knew they were now divorced and they were free from each other. He was right, he thought.

Now, Jesus says if we are going to be a follower of Him, we can't have that attitude. You can't have the attitude that you can get out of your married

relationship just by giving your spouse a certificate of divorce. Jesus says that every man who divorces his wife, except on the grounds of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery—and any man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Now, can I remind you that these are not my words? This is Jesus. I am mindful that I represent Jesus here, so I want to make sure we understand what Jesus saying here. If we are followers of Christ and we divorce our spouses for any reason other than sexual immorality in some form, we, the person who's divorcing the other person, causes our spouse to commit adultery. This passage is teaching you not only don't want to commit adultery, but you don't want to cause your spouse to commit adultery, and the way you cause your spouse to commit adultery is by divorcing them without the grounds of sexual immorality. Jesus is saying the fault lies with the one who causes the divorce; the fault is not with the one being divorced, unless they have committed some form of sexual immorality. So I want to make sure we understand this if we are going to be a follower of Christ (are you single men listening to me?), once you enter into a relationship of marriage, you cannot get out of it, except if your spouse commit sexual immorality. If you get out of it for any other reason, you cause them to commit adultery. So what is Jesus teaching here? If we are going to follow Him, we are going to flourish not just in the world, we are going to flourish in our married relationship, and we recognize that relationship is permanent.

Now, I want to point something out here. When I came to Hardin, you allowed me to continue going to Bible college, and I was so thankful to get to study the original languages under Mike Morris. I am not a Greek scholar by any stretch of imagination, but I can read the scholars. You need to understand that English translations struggle with how to translate this passage because they are translating an infinitive passive. You know what an infinitive is and you know what passive mode is. What Jesus is saying here is the person who gets abandoned in the marriage—the sin is not on them; the sin is on the person who is doing the divorcing. It is passive; something is being done to them. What's being done to them? They are being put in a position to be viewed as an adulteress or an adulterer, so that once the man in Jewish society left his wife and she remarried, even the man who married her would be viewed as an

adulterer. If you follow the text, Jesus is putting the blame on the person who divorced without just cause—and according to Jesus, just cause is sexual immorality. That's it. That's all He says.

I think there are a lot of questions here that are unanswered, and this is a very serious subject. It just so happened that Jesus addresses this with more clarity in Matthew chapter 19. I want us to go there, but before we do I want us to go to Deuteronomy chapter 24 because I want you to see what's behind the scenes here. In verses 1–4, here is what Moses tells the children of Israel before they get ready to go into the Promised Land, “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance.” This is what Jesus is alluding to in Matthew chapter 5. Moses said if a man realizes that there is something in his wife that's not favorable in his eyes and he's finding an indecency in her, he has to write out a certificate divorce, put it in her hand, and send her away. If she goes and marries somebody else and then doesn't live up to that man's expectations and he despises her, or if the man just dies, the first husband can't ever go back and marry her, because in the eye of the Law she became another man's wife. Once you have divorced your wife and she marries somebody else—whether you have married anybody else or not doesn't matter—once she married somebody else, you cannot ever get her back. That's an abomination in God's eyes.

Now, the Jews didn't emphasize that last part much. What they emphasize was this first part—if a man realizes his wife is not favorable in his eyes, and there is something indecent in her that he's found, he can divorce her. That led to two schools of thought: one conservative, one liberal. It was

daylight and dark difference. By the time of Jesus, this is what Jesus alluding to, the conservative thought was the only thing a man could divorce his wife over that's indecent has to be something sexually related, something immoral. The liberal thought was if she doesn't please you, you could divorce her. And so the rabbis had to determine what was indecent. So, here is what you could divorce your wife over if you were a Jewish man. I'm not making this up...if she didn't salt your food properly, you could divorce her. If she burnt your bread, you could divorce her. Ladies, are you ready for this one? You are going to be in big trouble...if he ever heard you talk bad, or negative, or critical about his mother or his dad, he could divorce you. Yeah. Now, you know this. Even when you are liberal, there is extreme liberalism. Agreed? Extreme liberalism said this to a man...when you married your wife you thought she was the prettiest lady in the world, but she hasn't taken care of herself as she should have so if you now find a lady who is prettier than her, you can divorce your wife for the prettier woman. Therefore, in Jesus's day the thought was marriage isn't permanent. Marriage isn't about us; marriage is about me and what I get from this. So in Matthew chapter 19, the Pharisees come to Jesus to test Him. They test Him with this question: Is it Lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?

See, they are testing Jesus with the liberal thought of the day and they want to see what He is going to do. Now, I don't know about you but I love it when the enemies of Jesus test Him. The reason I love it is because when I was in school, I loved test day. Test day was my absolute favorite day of the week at school. I never could understand why everybody else dreaded tests. If you did what you are supposed to do as a student and knew the material the teacher was going to teach, when the teacher gave you that piece of paper you filled it out in about ten to fifteen minutes, and then the rest of the time you could do whatever you want to do while everybody else is finishing the test. You knew that test was just going to measure what you knew, and you knew that you knew what the teacher wanted you to know, so a test is just an opportunity to reveal what you know, amen! Jesus loved test. Why? Because when they came to test Him, He got to reveal what He knows, and now He is going to reveal what He knows, not about divorce but about marriage. See, if you read Matthew

5:31–32 through a really narrow lens, you think Jesus is addressing divorce. He's not. He is addressing marriage. And in Matthew chapter 19, to answer this question, He doesn't go back and refute, agree, disagree, or dissect what Moses said in Deuteronomy chapter 24 about the bill of divorce and about what indecency is. Notice what He does. He goes back to creation. He goes back to Genesis and He talks about how in the beginning, God created male and female, and therefore, shall a man leave his father, mother, cleave his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. The two become one...therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate.

Please hear this. Jesus reveals marriage is a covenant relationship between a male and a female. If we were to go back and read these accounts in Genesis 1 and 2, God creates, everything is good, and then he creates mankind, male, and female after His image and it's very good. Then God takes a break and He rest. And then we go to Genesis 2, and after God is rested, we have this view of the earth and then God decides to create man. See, if you read Genesis 1, you kind of think He may have created him at the same time, but when you come to Genesis 2, He doesn't. He creates the man first and then realizes the man's all alone, he's a part, and then He creates a wife. Now, I want you to see what we see in Genesis 1. In Genesis 1, here is the picture we have...God's primary plan for mankind is for man to find his wife who is female, and then come together as a couple, be sexual, multiply and fill the earth, and then rule and reign. But when God begins to show us exactly how this works, He creates a man out of the dust of the ground; you can call him an old clod, that's perfectly okay because that's all he is, an old clod. But God took that old clod, breathed into his nostril the breath of life, and that clod became a living being. So we have mankind, a body, soul/spirit being, he has a great home (the Garden of Eden), he has a great job (a farmer), he has great hobbies, he has dominion over all the animal kingdom, and yet God says it's not good. It's not good that man should be alone. Are you with me? He's alone. The Hebrew word here means he is a part. You know what it means to be a part. See, everything had its companion, yet not man. So God said it's not good that he be a part. So God caused a sleep to come upon him, He took a part of the part, created another part, brought the part to the

part, and the part wakes up says, *wow, at last! Bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh: She shall be called Ishshah for she was taken from Ish!* He has just seen Miss Universe, amen! And he realized she was made for him. He's not a part anymore; he has his other part.

And now, Scripture tells us, "Therefore," based on God creating the wife for the man, "shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall become one flesh." Single men; listen to me. If you find a girl that you want to marry, you are saying to her and God that you are going to leave your mama and daddy. This isn't referring to just moving out of the house. Most Hebrew scholars believe it's better translated this way: Therefore, shall a man forsake...therefore, shall a man abandon his mom and dad. Now, you moms and dads say you don't like that. Here is the emphasis. When a man gets ready to have a wife and views the relationship he's going to have with her—when you look at the relationship that he has with his mom and dad, it's as if he *abandoned* them when you view this relationship to his wife. Please tell me you are getting this. There should never be an in-law problem in a marriage, never! Why? Because the man and the woman leave their moms and dads. Moms and dads, you better let them go because this is what God has ordained! I shouldn't say this but I'm just going to say it. If you, as a girl, marry a mama's boy, that's on you. If I were a young lady, I would never marry a mama's boy. I would wait until he grew up and became a man, amen?

There is a *leaving* according to Jesus; this is not according to me. And then, there is a *cleaving*. The ESV says, "Hold fast together." The word literally means here 'to pursue hotly.' I love that. Here is a guy who chooses the girl he's going to marry, and when he makes that decision to leave mom and dad, he's in hot pursuit. He's pursuing aggressively a relationship with the girl, his wife. It literally means they are cemented together. The best analogy we could use today would be they are welded together. I'll never forget this learning this on the farm. I could always tell if my welding wasn't up to snuff because if the weld broke that mean I didn't weld it correctly. If something is welded correctly, you know this right. It will never break cleanly. It always breaks on one side or the other of the actual weld. That's the picture here. When you get married, God

joins you together so that weld can't break cleanly. We have people here this morning who have been through a divorce and they will testify to this; that other person will always be a part of their life. Can't help it. That weld just can't break cleanly because that is God's plan, for us to become one. The picture is you are stuck. You are stuck with the person you choose to marry for life, and that's the righteousness we are called to in the church. That's the righteousness we are called to as a follower of Christ. Years ago, I was preaching something similar to this and I made that comment, and from that day since, every time Celisa and I have a discussion (we occasionally have a discussion) she will look at me with a big grin on her face, point that little finger at me, and say, "I just want you to know you are stuck with me." And boy, at the time it aggravates me so bad for her to tell me I'm stuck with her, but I have to be honest with you...down deep I am so thankful I am stuck with her because I know that not only am I stuck with her, she's stuck with me. There is no way out because we became one. We became one physically, we became one spiritually, and we became one psychologically. And it wasn't me making this happen, it wasn't her making this happen, it wasn't the preacher making this happen, it wasn't the church making this happen; it was God making this happen. That is why when Jesus quotes that the two shall become one flesh, Jesus adds again, the two shall become one. Therefore what God has joined together...see, it is God who joined you together. It's His covenant that you are entering into and He joins you together...therefore, let not man separate.

Now, do you understand why Jesus says what He says in Matthew chapter 5:31-32? Jesus said you have heard it said if a man divorces his wife, give her a bill of divorcement, but I say to every man...*huh, uh... if you divorce her, unless she committed an act of sexual immorality, you cause her to commit adultery. And the man who marries her? You are responsible for that too.* Are you feeling this? So you understand this next question in Matthew 19. The next question is, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" They are asking why did Moses command us to divorce our wife if we find an indecency in her and don't like something about her? Jesus answers, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the

beginning it was not so.” That word, hardness of heart, is a compound word, *sklērokardía*. We get an English medical term to talk about sclerosis of the artery of the heart. It describes how the artery going into your heart can get so hard that it doesn’t allow blood to flow properly to your heart, and then there is a tissue around your heart that will begin to harden because there is not enough blood flow. It’s restricted and it can lead to a heart attack, and once that takes place, your entire body shuts down. See, the root of the marital problem is the heart, the heart of the husband and the heart of the wife—and it’s a hard heart. It’s not about what is happening externally in your marriage; it’s about what’s happening in your heart and my heart. It’s about the blood of Jesus flowing through our veins so that we are acting and reacting properly to her spouse.

I know you hear this all the time in the United States of America, and I checked last night—according to the latest statistic in 2019, fifty percent of our marriages are still ending in divorce. I have some good news. If you are in your first marriage, fifty percent of first marriages do not dissolve, just forty-one percent, if you are in America. Then why is the divorce rate fifty percent? Well, usually when those people who divorced the first time marry the second time, sixty percent of them divorce. And then of the sixty percent that do divorce, they usually remarry. When you are in your third marriage, seventy-three percent of those marriages end in divorce. Whoa! Do you see why Jesus deals with the heart? Do you see why Jesus doesn’t want us trying to judge ourselves by external conformity to a law? He knows the problem is within. He does not want that relationship we have with our spouse to be based on a law that says something; He wants our relationship with our spouse to be based on the relationship we have with Him—so that our relationship with Him flows to that person we are married to, and then, our marriage becomes an illustration and example of the relationship that we have with Him. Wow!

Now, Jesus didn’t teach this, but Paul teaches that ultimately the relationship that you and I are in with our spouse (right now to think about the person you are married to) should picture Christ and the church. Does it? As a husband, are you loving her like Christ loved the church? Why not? You have a hard heart. I am being honest, a hard heart. This is not new. I

have said this for years. Divorce only acknowledges publicly what has already taken place privately, and that's a separation. And some of you men have moved away from your wives and some of you wives are moving away from your husband because you have a hard heart. I just want to remind all of us a standard we are called to. My relationship with Celisa is supposed to be based on my relationship with Christ. Her relationship with me pictures the relationship she has with Christ. I am supposed to picture Christ; she is supposed to picture the church. Let me ask this question. How many of you are absolutely tickled to death as a Christian that your sin does not cause Jesus to pull away from you and separate from you? Amen? You don't want to hear this, I'm not going to confess it to you, but quite often, I sin. I do things I know I shouldn't do. I am so thankful at that moment that my Jesus doesn't pull away from me! Then why are you pulling away from her? I know it hurts! Jesus went to a cross for you! Spread out those arms, those legs, and let them beat Him! He let God put all of your sin on Him, and He faced eternal damnation for you and me! And we won't go that extra mile with her? It's the fact that Jesus loves me the way He loves me that causes me not to want to do things that are wrong! And that's the kind of husbands we have to be. We are not going to let anything of man separate us from our wives because we believe God joined us together.

Do you know what psychologists say is the number one leading indicator of divorce? Are you ready for this? This is psychologists, not preachers, psychologists—avoidance of conflict. I can't tell you how many times over the years I have had a man come into my office and say, "Bro. Ricky, I didn't have a clue." "Didn't have a clue about what?" "Didn't have a clue she was leaving me." 1and then the man will always say this, "We didn't fuss or fight." You know, there is a reason why you might not be fussing and fighting in your home—because one of you ain't listening to the other one. Seventy-nine percent of women who divorce their husbands list communication as one of the leading problems. "He just won't talk to me." "He just won't communicate with me." Are you talking with her? Are you listening? Have you got to that point to where you have thrown up your hands? Your wife has needs. You are responsible for identifying what those needs are, prioritizing them in your life, elevating them to that place of

priority, and then looking within yourself to meet her needs. And ladies, your husband has needs too. God is ordained him to be the head of the household, to physically, spiritually, psychologically give leadership. You quit putting out his fire with your actions and your words! Realize God is designed him this way. Put fuel to them so that he can become who God has designed him to be, because you are in a relationship with him where together you picture Christ and the church. When it comes to marriage, it's for life...unless "I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery. Now, in Matthew 5, Jesus didn't talk about the person who is leaving the wife, but He says if you divorce her without just cause, you cause her to commit adultery. Now, He says, if you divorce her without just cause, you commit adultery too when you marry someone else...double whammy! If you are a man who left your wife for an unjust reason, you are not only commit adultery, you caused her to commit adultery.

What is just cause, according to Jesus? There is only one. That is sexual immorality. So if sexual immorality takes place, the spouse *can* break the marital covenant because the other person has broken the covenant when they brought somebody else into the relationship. I want you to listen to me. One of the hardest things I have to do is when I am with your wife or your husband and I have to tell them they have the right to divorce you because of the affair you just had. They have that right. Not all Christians exercise that right, but I want to say this—I have been with countless, countless couples. Don't ever judge someone who has had their spouse bring someone else into the relationship and they divorce them. If Jesus grants freedom to divorce and remarry, the church is going to grant that same freedom to divorce and remarried. Please don't go down that lustful road! You pluck that eye out...you cut that hand off before you let Satan tempt you with another man or another woman, before you go on the internet and start exploring and lusting—please don't go there! It's not about divorce; it's about marriage. It's about us being in a relationship with our spouse where we picture Christ and the church.

Now, I want you to see the reaction of the disciples in Matthew 19. The disciples said to Jesus, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is

better not to marry.” I want to slap those guys! Are you hearing what they are saying? Jesus just said you are in this for life with your wife unless there is adultery. And it dawns on these guys if they get into that relationship, they can’t just get out for any reason. So now they are saying it’s better to not ever marry if the only way out is adultery! Are you kidding me? Are you kidding me? So Jesus answers and says...*hey, there are very few people who can stay single the rest of their lives.* So that means most of us are going to get married. So, when you get married, it is for life. Why is it for life? Because God holds us to a different standard of righteousness. I just have to throw this in—if you are looking for someone to marry that most likely is not going to have an affair on you, according to research, you need to marry a farmer, a foot doctor, an eye doctor, a preacher, or an agricultural engineer. They are the men and women with the professions least likely to have an affair. According to statistics, you don’t want to marry a professional dancer or a bartender, and I can go on and on and on. Can I give you the good news? In the church, I have always heard the divorce statistics the same; that’s not true. According to 2019 research, if you are part of an evangelical church, the likelihood of you getting divorced in your lifetime is twenty-six percent. For a Roman Catholic, it’s twenty-eight percent. If you are a non-Christian who doesn’t attend church, it jumps to almost forty percent. Don’t let Satan condemn you. The gospel brings grace, and forgiveness, and a second chance. Please apply this message to the relationship you are in right now in the covenant of marriage. If you are getting ready to get married, don’t get married unless you are willing to meet this standard of righteousness.