



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 19:1–12; Genesis 2:18–25;  
Deuteronomy 24:1–4

Gospel of Matthew

“Christ and Divorce”

TRANSCRIPT

Now we are going to look at three passages in our Scripture reading this morning, because I think it is important in understanding Matthew chapter 19 to read a few verses from Genesis chapter 2, and then a few verses from Deuteronomy chapter 24, since these are the passages that our Lord and also the Pharisees have in mind when this encounter takes place.

So let's turn back to the book of Genesis and let me read a few verses beginning with the 18th verse of the 2nd chapter. Genesis chapter 2 and verse 18, and here we read,

“And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had

taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall Be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

I want you to notice, particularly, that 24th verse, and notice that it is either the word of Adam or the word of Moses; most likely the latter.

“And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”

Let’s turn now to Deuteronomy chapter 24, in which we have some instruction in the Mosaic legislation concerning marriage and divorce. And when the Pharisees come to the Lord Jesus, this is the passage that they have in mind when they ask their question. Now as we read this passage, I must make one suggestion to you. You know, when we have conditional sentences such as, if the air conditioning is not working today, then Dr. Johnson will suffer during the message, we have two parts of a sentence. One of which is known, technically, as the protasis, and the other is known as the apodosis. The protasis is the “if” clause: if the air conditioning is not working. And then the conclusion is the apodosis. One represents that which we set forward as a premise, and the other is an answering clause to that premises.

Now we have that in these verses here, in the four verses that I’m going to read, and the first three verses form the protasis, and the fourth verse is the apodosis. Unfortunately, the King James Version has not done this as accurately as one might have, and has rather taken the first verse to contain both the protasis and the beginning of the apodosis in that clause that begins with, “then let him write her a bill of divorcement.” That is taken as the beginning of the apodosis in the King James Version. I think that is an error. In the Hebrew text, it is the simple *vov* (or *vov*), which

means, really, “and.” And in the light of the whole of this passage, almost all of the scholars of the Hebrew text have now come to the conclusion that we do have the conclusion, or the apodosis in verse 4, and we have a lengthy protasis preceding.

Now, the reason I’m saying this is because if we take it the way the King James Version has it, then it is commanded that a man give a wife a bill of divorcement: “then let him write her a bill of divorcement,” and, so divorce becomes a command. It is evident, however, from the New Testament interpretation, as well as the grammatical structure of these verses, that it is not a command, but rather something that is, as our Lord says, permitted. And so the condition is a condition of three verses and one, rather than one and three. Let me read it, now, in the light of that.

“When a man hath taken a wife, (and this opening word, when, corresponds to an “if” kind of clause) and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: (and he) write(s) her a bill of divorcement, and give(s) it in her hand, and send(s) her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man’s wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; (*then*—I am supplying this “then,” because that, I think, is the force of the Hebrew text here) then her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.”

So you see, the thing that is being denied here, the thing that is being prohibited, is a man who has given his wife a bill of divorcement, who in turn has married again, and who has been divorced or

her husband has died—the thing that is prevented is the original husband taking back the wife. She is now defiled. That’s the point of these verses.

That is important for the passage that we’re going to read for our Scripture reading this morning. So let’s turn now to Matthew chapter 19, and we read the first twelve verses for our passage for today.

“And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan; and great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there. The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, ‘Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?’”

Now, our Lord did not answer this directly, as we shall see, but indirectly. He appeals to Genesis chapter 2 first.

“And he answered and said unto them, ‘Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.’ They say unto him, ‘Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?’ He saith unto them, ‘Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. (In other words, he says the original intention is found in Genesis rather than in Deuteronomy.) And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall

marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.”

If you have a modern language version with you—or if you have a version with marginal notes—you will notice that the last clause of, or clause or two, of that verse after “adultery,” first, is not found in your text. And that’s because the most ancient manuscripts of the Gospel of Matthew at this point do not have those words, and therefore we shall omit them in the exposition. The idea found in them is found in one of the parallels, but we will leave them out. Now verse 10:

“His disciples say unto him, ‘If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.’ But he said unto them, ‘All men cannot receive this saying, except they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, who were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, who were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.”

May God bless this reading from his Word.

The subject for today is “Christ and Divorce.” The 20th century has been called, “The Age of Adultery,” and its citizens have been called “the new adulterers.” Adultery is not new, nor is the philosophy of the new adulterers new. Adulterers have been young. They have been old. They have been rich, and they have been poor. They have been kind. They have been cruel. They have been brutish, and they have been gentlemanly. They have been religious, and they have been irreligious. They have been Catholic, and they have been Protestant, and they have been Jew. And they have been businessmen, and they have been businesswomen. And furthermore, they have been professional men, and they have been preachers.

Some repent, and some do not.

What is the difference, today, if any? Is it the arrogance of the departure from the truths of the Word of God that characterizes the new adulterers? Is it the proud indulgence that characterizes them? Most of us agree that we have come into a new situation. When I think of that, I think of a saying of an old American League baseball umpire, George Magerkurth, who in a famous malapropism said, “We have seen the dawn of a new area.” [Laughter] Well, we have truly seen the dawn of a new era, it would seem, in the relationship of the male and the female in the United States of America and in our Western world in the last few decades.

Another thing that characterizes the new adulterers is that they are prolific with pens. And in their use of the pen, they justify their views. And they detestably, it seems to me, pervert the English language in an attempt to support the things that they are enjoying. They frequently use the term, honesty. Honesty is a term that used to mean that, well, you do not steal or you do not lie or do not cheat; you’re trustworthy. Now, honesty has come to mean “letting people see us as we are.” Perhaps that’s not too bad; that’s very common among our people in our society today to think that is a very noble thing for people to see us as we are. I don’t object to that too much.

But then it’s made to become a cover for selfishness, for crudeness and for immorality: “Yes, we’re living together out of wedlock, but we are honest, and furthermore, it’s healthy.” I don’t think it’s healthy. I don’t really think it’s honesty in the true sense of the term, honesty. I’m more inclined to think of Paul who spoke of the antinomians of his day as men and women who gloried in their shame. Margaret Mead has said that “What we should have in the 20th century is not monogamy but serial monogamy, one at a time.”

Alvin Toffler, in *Future Shock*, said that he anticipated the day when executives would not go through the wrenching experience of moving a family from one city to another. Many of you in this room have had that experience. I know, because that is characteristic of modern business, to move their executives about. Well, he suggested that the time will come when there will be no moving about of families, but only the executive will move, and that it will be the job of the

corporation to find an appropriate family with an appropriate lifestyle and appropriate wife and children and other things to which he may, simply, plug-in, and therefore they may escape all of the problems of moving the family across the country.

Our Lord’s words, then, would seem to have a special relevance for our society. Now I know that perhaps you’re thinking, well after all, we are Christians and not worldly. We are not worldly people. We are not of the world, and so why is this so relevant for us? Well this is relevant for us for the simple reason that the church is always is extremely, strongly affected by the experiences and the lifestyles of the world, and well all know this.

I think one of the things that impressed me more than anything else, when the elders asked me to come back to Believers Chapel and to speak regularly in the morning service, this is one of the things that impressed me almost more than anything else, because I think the first six people who asked to come and talk with me, of the first six, five were having marital problems. They weren’t all from Believers Chapel, but they were all Christians, and they were all having serious marital problems. Now, I think our Lord’s words have a special relevance for us, and they have an even more special relevance for the young who are thinking about marriage.

The occasion of this incident was the enmity of the Pharisees, and their desire to catch our Lord Jesus in some statement by which they might justifiably accuse him before the Sanhedrin. And furthermore, I think that lying back of this was the continuing dispute over the meaning of Deuteronomy chapter 24 and the expression, “if the man should find in his wife something unseemly.”

Now this had been the occasion of a great deal of debate among the Jewish interpreters of the Old Testament. One school of rabbis—or one school of Jewish interpreters under Rabbi Shammai—had interpreted this very strictly. They had interpreted that unseemly thing that a man found in his wife as being fornication, or adultery. And so that became the only occasion for the giving of a bill of divorcement.

But Rabbi Hillel and his followers thought differently. They thought that a man could divorce his wife for any, somewhat inconsequential thing, for almost any cause. For example, if a wife did not prepare breakfast properly and burned the food, that was sufficient cause for divorce. Now, I must say I sympathize a little with that [laughter], I think I've had occasion for it myself. But scripturally, of course, it is not. In fact, it was also said that if a woman raised her voice so high that the neighbors could hear it, that was sufficient.

And then some rabbis—not specifically Rabbi Hillel—said that if a man found a woman who was more attractive than his wife, that sufficiently fulfilled the text of Deuteronomy chapter 24 to make it possible for a divorce to take place. So you see, with these two important schools of opinion concerning interpretation, when the Pharisees came to the Lord Jesus and asked him, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” they were raising for him a dilemma, and he was bound to lose some support.

Now politicians would somehow or other be able to solve a question like this, but our Lord was never a politician. He never thought to sit on the fence and maintain support from two contradictory parties, and so he did express himself very directly, and soon we learn that he stood on the side of the strict school. No question about that. But they knew that by forcing him to answer this question, he would have to declare himself.

Now, he had come from Galilee to Judaea, and was on the other side of the River Jordan in Perea. Great multitudes had followed him there. And he healed them, performing still the signs that marked him out, according to the Old Testament record as the Messiah. And it's there that the Pharisees came with their questions.

The Jews, remember, had very high views of marriage. They even thought that it was the duty of a young man who reached the age of twenty to marry, except in order to concentrate on the study of the law. Now, I know that it is gospel news for some of the young ladies, but nevertheless that is the way they felt about it. They felt that marriage was something that young men should undergo.



Furthermore, they had other things that led to an extremely high view of marriage and divorce. They said, “He who had no children slew his own posterity and lessened the image of God upon the earth.” “When a husband and wife are worthy,” so they said, “the glory of God is with them.” So there was every incentive to marry, apart from the study of the law of Moses and also to stay married among them.

The Jewish laws of marriage and purity also aimed high. Ideally, divorce was hated. God said in Malachi chapter 2, a passage that it just so happens—isn’t that something for a Calvinist to say? [laughter]—it just so happens that we take up Wednesday night in our studies of Malachi, there God says, “I hate putting away.” That’s the divine attitude toward divorce. It was said that the very altar wept tears when a man divorced the wife of his youth. And there’s a great deal of truth in this, and I think you can see the background out of which the Pharisees came with the question, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?”

And in the answer that the Lord Jesus gives, the first thing I want you to notice, of course, is that he does not answer this directly. His answer is a more complete answer. He could have answered it more directly and immediately and settled the question. But it was more important, he thought, for them to understand the basis upon which he gave his answer. And so he appealed to Genesis chapter 2 in order to interpret Deuteronomy chapter 24 and then answer them. Now, that is good scriptural methodology. We interpret the New Testament in the light of the Old Testament, or we interpret the Old in the light of the New as well—that, too is a valid principle (although they’re certain strictures that we might be sure to place upon our methodology there). But we do interpret the Testaments by looking at them both.

Now, I want you to notice one thing before we look at his answer, which I think is rather important and expresses an important attitude which the Lord Jesus had with reference to the Word of God. In answer to them he says, “Have ye not read that he who made them at the beginning made them male and female and said, For this cause a man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they too shall be one flesh.” So he said, you’re asking me a question about

Deuteronomy 24, but I want you to consider the fundamental passage which is Genesis chapter 2. And did you not read that the one who made them at the beginning—now who was it that made them at the beginning? Why that of course is God—made them male and female and said, for our Lord is saying that the one who made them at the beginning, the Father or God, is the one who said, “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother.”

Now when you turn back to the Old Testament and read that Genesis account in the light of what our Lord Jesus says here, you’ll discover as you read the account of Genesis chapter 2, it is not the God who made them that said those words. It is Moses who said those words. It is Moses who said, “For this cause a man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they too shall be one flesh.” The Lord Jesus says the one who made them male and female, the one who created them in the beginning, is the one who said it.

Now you can see that in this there is a philosophy of Scripture. Professor Warfield and others have pointed out down through the years that we have revealed here our Lord’s understanding of Scripture. He thought that the Old Testament was the Word of God. Now we are inclined at times to say that Scripture is the product of God and the product of man. That is false in my understanding. The Scripture is not the product of God and the product of man. The Scripture is the Word of God through a man. Man is the instrumentality; he’s not the source of Scripture. Scripture is God’s Word through a man.

Now you can find that illustrated over and over again—we have seen that—in the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, when he speaks about that spoken by the Lord “through the prophet,” distinguishing in the use of prepositions direct agency or indirect intermediate agency: by the Lord through the prophet. But the Scripture is the Word of God. So the Old Testament and the New Testament are regarded by the writers of Holy Scripture and by our Lord as the Word of God. That’s what Paul means when he says, “All Scripture is God-breathed”—breathed out by God.

It is not as if God saw a book written by Moses and said, that’s not a bad book, and as he turned the pages said, well, as a matter of fact, I think I agree with everything in it. In fact, I think I

agree with everything in it, and therefore I will breathe into it; therefore, it constituted an inspired record. No, no. It came from God through Moses, so that when Moses wrote, he wrote what God intended to be written. So, the Word of God is the Word of God. Augustine said, in the *Confessions*, putting words in the mouth of God as he does throughout that work, “Indeed, O man, what my Scripture says, I say.” I think that’s a good expression of a doctrine of Scripture that is true. Indeed, O man, what my Scripture says, I say.

Now I think that’s rather startling that the Lord Jesus should say that the one who made them at the beginning also said these words. This is not an accident. You can turn to the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews and find three or four other illustrations of the same thing, and it occurs in other places in the New Testament. It’s not something that was unique. It was not an accident. It was an expression of an attitude toward the Word of God. The Word of God is the Word of God. And, we need to remember that constantly.

Well now, let’s get to our Lord’s answer. He makes these points in my opinion. First of all, in the fact that he refers to the Old Testament, he acknowledges that he regards that Old Testament record as the record of God’s thoughts concerning marriage, and I think that we can say right at the beginning that he regarded marriage as an institution that was received by man from God.

Even in the Genesis account, it is said that God took a rib from the side of Adam, and he made the woman and he brought her to the man. It is not absurd for us to say that marriage is something received from men by God. It’s not even absurd to say that the first officiant at the first wedding ceremony was God himself. He was the first officiant at a wedding ceremony. Marriage is something that is received by men from God. It is a divine institution.

Now I think that the next thing we can say about it is that it was a purposeful union. Men do not marry without purpose; they marry for a purpose. Now, we know, of course, that they marry in order that the race might be propagated. They married that they might be fruitful and multiply. That’s why the Jews said a young man of twenty should be married unless he studied the law. It was that he might be fruitful and multiply.

But in the context of Genesis chapter 2, God said it’s not good that the man be alone. So evidently, the fellowship that exists between the two is important in the eyes of God. And the experience of marriage is not simply for procreation. It is for other and significant purposes also. And I think one of the greatest blessings of married life is the blessing of the fulfillment that comes from personal fellowship on all the planes of our human being: spiritual, intellectual, and physical.

Now then, I think he says another thing in the texts in the way they are used. He says that in the ideal, marriage is a monogamous union. He said, “They two shall be one flesh”—they two, but the two of them so united that they become one flesh. Therefore, the divine ideal is one marriage. They, too, shall become one flesh.

And finally, I think we can say the Lord Jesus regarded marriage as a permanent union. We read, here, for example—or rather, verse 5—“For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife.” That word is very interesting. That word in the Greek text is a word that meant, literally to glue or cement together—something I don’t think that we are to take literally—but you can see that it expresses a union that is regarded as permanent. Erasmus referred to this in the Latin text and translated this, *aglutinabatur*, which means the same thing, “shall be glued together.” You can recognize our English word from the Latin word, *aglutinabatur*, the future tense of that word. Glued together. So, the ideal is an indissoluble union. He says, “And shall cleave to his wife.”

Incidentally, some have pointed out, and I think it’s fair, in order to “cleave to your wife,” you do have to leave your mother. [Laughter] You cannot cleave before you leave. There are, unfortunately, some, both females and males, who have not really left. And an attempt to cleave is virtually impossible.

I am very happy that when I was married, my wife left, and we have had a very happy marriage through the years. But, that is one of the requirements, young people. A man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they, too shall be one flesh. And then, our Lord adds something that’s a little new. He says, “Wherefore they are no more two but one flesh, what therefore God hath joined together”—that word means literally to yoke together. So you see, God

really does join people together in marriage. It was God who joined Adam and Eve. Marriages are made in heaven.

While that may seem absurd in our society, nevertheless it is true. When two people under God come together in holy matrimony, we can rest assured that this institution is something given by God, and as we look to him, we can expect him to be with us in that marriage and that the purposes of God may be accomplished in it. I think we can conclude that the Lord Jesus has told these Pharisees that marriage is a permanent, divine institution.

The reason people come together is not that they might do one thing together, but that they might do all things together. We're living in a society in which people think that because they have an imperious physical desire, they should come together and marry. But let me assure you, if that is the reason you are marrying, your marriage is foredoomed to failure. We do not marry in order that we may do one thing together; we marry that we may do all things together. That's very important, seems to me. And I think that's a word of advice that all young people—and older people—need to remember.

And I do think it's good to give some practical advice. The Puritans believed in that. One of the Puritans said, “First, he must choose his love, and then he must love his choice.” [Laughter] He must be very careful that he make the right choice. And then another Puritan who was a little more bashful about marriage said, “It's not evil to marry, but it's good to be wary.” [Laughter] That's good advice, too.

And for you young men and for you young women, don't rush into something like this. Now, you don't have to do as I did. I went with my wife for eight years before we were married. I wanted to be sure. [Boisterous laughter] And I had not read Thomas Gottfacher's remarks, either, about being wary. Course, I should have. My first date with my wife was when she was 13, and I was 15. And we had mutual first cousins, and so I knew her rather well before we were married.

Well, the Lord Jesus now has answered the question by saying to the Pharisees, you must remember that marriage is a permanent, divine institution. Ah, they said, but now we've got him.

Now, we’ve got him. Because Moses, evidently, said something about divorce, and Jesus has just said marriage is a permanent, divine institution. For I can just imagine them—we’ve really got a point of attack, now! And so they ask for the microphone [Dr. Johnson laughs]—Dr. Clark is here. I remember our beautiful discussions that we’ve had over the last couple of days.

One of them asks for the microphone and says, “Are you saying that Moses was wrong?” That’s what they say. “Why, then did Moses command to give her a writing of divorcement and to put her away?” You say marriage is a permanent, divine institution. Moses talked about divorce. Are you saying Moses was wrong? Because, you see, if they could prove that he really was saying Moses was wrong, they knew they would have him, because they all knew that Moses wrote truth, and they believed that Moses wrote truth. And if they could get him to deny Mosaic truth, they would have him.

Now, our Lord, as he usually does, just shows that he’s a better interpreter of Moses than they, and so he says unto them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to put away your wives. But from the beginning it was not so.” In other words, he says, it’s true Deuteronomy 24 does say something about divorce, but Deuteronomy 24 is not the ideal. The ideal is Genesis chapter 2. And Deuteronomy 24 should be interpreted in the light of Genesis 2, and you should not forget Genesis chapter 2 when you look at Deuteronomy chapter 24.

That correction of the Pharisees is an important thing, and I want you to notice just a couple of points. He says in verse 8, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts.” You know, we sometimes have people in the present century who think that it is extremely old fashioned to believe in the depravity of the human heart. Our Lord would have been so regarded. But unfortunately, these people who deny the depravity of the human heart do not read our Lord, and so consequently, they think of our Lord as a kind of person who never said anything about human evil, but rather talked about nice, sweet, syrupy kinds of things. They’d rather think of God as a sentimental, senile man in heaven, who overlooks all of our playing down here on the earth.

Now one thing that we learn from our Lord’s words is this: that he believed in the depravity of the human heart. The statements are manifold. He said, for example, “If ye, then, being evil know how to give good gifts,” and here he says, “because of the hardness of your hearts.”

Dostoyevsky, in one of his darker moments, said that “He never knew of any sin that he could not conceive of himself as committing.” He had a good insight into the human heart, at least in that statement. For it is true, there is no sin that a single person in this auditorium could not, under the right circumstances, commit. So he says, because of the hardness of your hearts. He knew this ideal of Genesis chapter 2 demanded, ultimately, that some relief be granted to the offended party, and so he allowed for that relief.

Now, I want you to notice this word that he uses. He says, “Moses, on account of the hardness of your hearts, *permitted* you to put away your wives.” Now, the Pharisees were interested in that concession. They laid a great deal of stress on the concession. Our Lord lays stress on the ideal, but he acknowledges the concession. But he says you should pay attention to what a concession really is. When, for example, we read, here that Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts permitted you to put away your wives, that is an acknowledgement of the fact that God tolerated something that was not intrinsically good. When we say he permitted it, we say he tolerated it. But the fact that he tolerated it does not mean that it is intrinsically good.

So Deuteronomy chapter 24 is provided to give some relief to offended parties out of the goodness of the heart of God out of the evil of the heart of men. But it was only a tolerated thing. Moses permitted it—incidentally, when we read that text in Deuteronomy, we read it in such a way that it is not said that divorce was commanded. As a matter of fact, divorce is not commanded anywhere, as far as I know, but relief is granted to the offended party.

And the one condition—the one thing—is, except it be for fornication. Our Lord goes on to say, “And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication.” Divorce is permitted if fornication has taken place. Incidentally, we may gather from this that if fornication has

not taken place, then it becomes a sin to divorce. That has a great deal of implication for our present experiences and practices today.

At this point, I think if someone would say, “Well with what rabbi do you side?” He would say, “Well, I have to side with those of Rabbi Shammai,” but since our Lord doesn’t pay a great deal of attention to what rabbis say, ever, he doesn’t say anything about that. He spoke to them not as the scribes, but as one who had authority, and so he expresses his mind, and his mind is that “except it be for fornication.”

Now there is a little bit of question about the interpretation of this verse, but I see no reason for thinking that this exceptive clause, at it has been called, is not genuine here. I do think it is genuine. I know that it is not given in Mark and Luke, and some seem to think that is a great problem, that this exceptive clause is not stated in Mark and Luke.

But then, the Bible never claims to give us all truth about any particular point in once place. We have to follow the analogy of Scripture, as Dr. Clark as been saying. When we interpret Scripture, we do use the analogy of faith, and so we let Scripture interpret Scripture. And we must let Scripture interpret Scripture; this is our *principium*. This is the place from which we get our instruction as the Holy Spirit teaches us. And so, he says, “Whosoever putteth away his wife, except for fornication, and marrieth another committeth adultery.”

Well, our Lord doesn’t answer all of the modern questions that we have in this passage. We would have to look through all of the New Testament at the other passages that bear on the topic to answer them.

What about incompatibility, for example? Well, clearly, that does not seem to be a biblical ground for divorce. It is said, of course, this is absurd thinking. I have before me, now, an article in one of our national, weekly magazines in which an author, in a full-page article, called “The Divorce Go-round,” just three years ago expressed an opinion concerning these Mosaic and biblical instructions, and called them all absurd. He did acknowledge, however, that when they were carried



out, divorce was rare. But today, we cannot live by that; our views have changed. He was so right. Our views have changed, and unfortunately, divorce is now common.

And for every marriage or every three marriages, there are usually two divorces now in the United States of America, and in some places worse than that. Not long ago here in the county, Dallas County, the number of divorces equaled the number of marriages one year.

What does this text say about remarriage? Well, it doesn't say anything definitely about remarriage. The implication is that a person who gains a legitimate divorce, or who experiences a legitimate divorce is free to remarry. But that is not stated, here in the text.

What's the influence of regeneration? Suppose a person has been married and divorced in a non-Christian state, and then let's suppose that they become a Christian. Then, what effect does that have? Does that wipe the slate, clean? Little is said in the Bible that I know that bears directly on this point, and so, as I've often said to you, we can distinguish two or three things when we listen to the preacher.

We can distinguish, first of all, what the Word of God says, and that's to be believed. And secondly, we can distinguish what the Word of God says, and what the preacher says that is says, and that's something that's not to be believed with quite the same force and certainty that the Word of God is to be believed. And then we can also hear from the minister and preacher-teacher things that he infers from what the Scriptures say, and they probably are to be believed even less, because, while inferences are very important—we cannot read the Bible without them—we have to infer. (I think, incidentally, Dr. Clark, you helped me with that through the years.) Anyone who interprets the Bible must do that, it is done in Scripture, but we should remember in the final analysis that we are human. The Holy Spirit is the only reliable and fully reliable interpreter of Scripture, so we can only grope for solutions to problems like the influence of regeneration.

I do believe that when a person has married and divorced, when he becomes a Christian, the guilt of that divorce is removed. But, as for the consequences, that's another matter. I know that alcoholics, when they come to faith in Christ, the guilt of their alcoholism is removed, but they may

have to suffer the ravages of that disease in their body for sometime thereafter. The consequences of our sin may persist, but the guilt may be forgiven. And it may well be in the case of marriage and divorce that while the guilt of our sin is forgiven, the consequences, well that’s another matter.

Well, we conclude. It’s 12 o’clock, now. Let me just make a comment concerning the last two or three verses. You can see the disciples sitting here, probably with mouths open as the Lord Jesus gives the exposition of Genesis and Deuteronomy and puts them together so beautifully, and in the course of it refutes the attitude of the Pharisees who have come to him. Well, they see this tremendous ideal of marriage to one woman for the whole of life, and so they say, “If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.” This ideal is too great, daunted by this high ideal.

Or the interpretation may be this. He’s just spoken about divorce, and he’s said the only way that you can get a divorce is through fornication. So if you marry, it looks like it’s permanent. And so, again, they say, if the case be so with his wife, then it’s best not to marry, because we don’t have these lax divorce regulations that Rabbi Hillel has propagated.

I’ve puzzled over this a good bit. In verse 11, “But he said unto them, ‘All men cannot receive this saying.’” The commentators think that perhaps that is referring to verse 9, but probably the majority think that it refers to verse 5 and the ideal: this saying. In other words, he is simply saying that this inference into a marriage is something that in the final analysis is regulated by God. Some men are to marry, and some are not. Some women are to marry, and some women are not.

“All men cannot receive this saying except they to whom it is given.” It would seem to me this lays a little bit of stress upon our marriage truly being in the will of God. And Paul, in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, it would seem, allows that it is possible—in fact, he says that it’s better that a man not marry—while it’s good that a person marry.

Well, at any rate, he goes on to say that there [are] certain occasions upon which marriage doesn’t take place. “For there are some eunuchs, who were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, who were made eunuchs by men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.”

And he challenges us at the end to seek the mind of God in the light of Scripture for our own relationship to regulations that concern the relations between a man and a woman.

Now let me close by just saying this. It is evident from our Lord’s words that he regarded marriage as an inviolable contract into which two people enter, which is permanent. It is a divine institution. And furthermore, we can expect in the light of his words, those who enter into his contract in the light of the Scriptural injunctions given, and look to God for his blessing upon them, as they unite, seeking to accomplish the will of God, representing the relationship of Jesus Christ and the church, as a testimony to the world, that they have the assurance that God will be with them in their marriage.

For you young people who are thinking about marriage, I do hope and pray that God will bring you to think very seriously that are found in the Word of God. If there should be someone here this morning who has not yet come to Christ, this has not been a message in which we’ve given the gospel. Not all passages give what we call the gospel, except insofar as we think of the whole of the Word of God as the good news that comes to us as the Word of God.

If you are here, and God has brought conviction to your heart that you are a sinner, we say to you that Christ died for sinners, and that if you come by the grace of God, having been moved by the Holy Spirit to a true faith in him, to a belief in the gospel message, you have come to the forgiveness of sins, to the justification of life, to membership in the family of God, and as an ambassador of Jesus Christ, I invite you to come to him. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father who gave the Son, the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit, be and abide with you all.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.