

Thinking Biblically About Divorce

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Date: 06 October 2024

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[0 : 00] Then the Lord said, And to every beast of the field.

But for Adam, there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept, took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man, he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called a woman because she was taken out of man. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. The second reading is from Matthew chapter 5, verses 30.

[1 : 36] I see it's an error there, but. Verse 31. I guess the 32.

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 whosoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Here ends the word. Thank you very much, Michelle.

As you can see this morning, the sermon is on a sensitive subject, the subject of divorce. But as most of you are aware this morning, the sermon is not about divorce because I woke up or decided that I would just preach a sermon on divorce.

The sermon is on divorce because as we work our way through the Sermon on the Mount, this is the text that we have come to this morning.

[2 : 54] In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed the subject of divorce, and he said some very sobering words about divorce.

And from the outside, let me just say that I recognize that some of you have walked through divorce. I recognize that some of you are walking through divorce.

And I recognize that hearing a sermon like this could awaken in your heart pain and guilt and shame and regret about divorce.

And I want to say up front that being mindful that I prayed for you, I prayed for you, I prayed for me, that I'd be faithful to bring God's word, that you'd be faithful to hear God's word.

I have no desire to inflict any additional or new pain upon your heart. I only desire this morning is to be faithful to bring God's word, and I have labored to try to do that.

[4 : 03] I also recognize that some are in difficult marriages. And oftentimes in a difficult situation, the only thing that could be on our minds is to get out, to just escape.

And some might be thinking that divorce is my only real, valid option in this difficult marriage. But I want to encourage you to consider this morning that God in his providence has positioned you to hear his word.

I encourage you to hear it with an open heart, an open mind, and respond to it as the Lord would have you to. But for all of us this morning, wherever we find ourselves, whatever circumstance we are in, if we have trusted in Jesus, here's what Romans 8, verse 1 says to all of us who have trusted in Jesus.

There's therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. And this is good news. And it's good news that nothing will ever change.

This is eternally good news. Before we look at the text, let's take a moment to pray.

[5 : 32] Heavenly Father, we are grateful this morning that we can sit under the preaching of your holy word. Lord, would you speak to us from your word?

Lord, I pray that above my voice, your voice will be heard in the sound of the preaching. Lord, you know where we all are.

You know what we all need to hear and how we need to hear it. And so we trust the work of the Spirit this morning to work as is required in and on all of our hearts.

Father, would you help me to bring your word to your people. And Lord, help us all to hear aright and respond aright for your glory and for our good.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. As we consider these words of Jesus in Matthew 5, 31-32, it's good to be reminded and bear in mind that Jesus is not speaking these words about divorce in a vacuum.

[6 : 55] They are connected to what he said and has been saying in the previous verses starting in verse 20 of Matthew 5. That's what Jesus said to his disciples, For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

And in these two verses, Jesus is continuing to illustrate to his disciples what it means for their righteousness and indeed our righteousness to exceed the legalistic righteousness of the Pharisees.

The outward show of righteousness of the Pharisees. He is showing them and calling them to let their lives be a contrast to the lives of the Pharisees.

And you'd recall in the first illustration we looked at in verses 21-26, Jesus used the sixth commandment, the commandment against murder that says we're not to commit murder.

and Jesus helps us to see that that command entails more than not shedding another person's blood. He said, if we're angry with our brother, if we revile our brother, we've murdered him in our hearts.

[8 : 16] And then the second illustration that Jesus gave us in verses 27-30. We consider this the last time we were in the Sermon on the Mount.

And here Jesus used the seventh commandment, the commandment against adultery. And he said that this commandment entails more than not engaging in physical sexual immorality or some physical sexual act with a person, a woman who is not our spouse.

Jesus said, if a man looks at a woman with lustful intent, he has committed adultery with her in his heart. And this morning we come to the third illustration of Jesus in verses 31-32.

But notice that it is a continuation of the second illustration. It's a continuation of the second illustration around the seventh commandment. And he started it in verses 27-30 when he said you shall not commit adultery.

So Jesus now is expanding that example where he says looking at a woman lustfully is adultery. And he's now adding another type of adultery.

[9 : 39] Divorcing your wife for a reason other than sexual immorality and marrying someone else. Jesus says that is adultery as well. So notice the progression.

Lust, adultery, and then divorce. But if you forget everything about this sermon and this one, here's what I don't want you to forget.

This sermon and indeed these two verses that we are looking at, divorce. This sermon is about more than divorce.

When Jesus spoke these words in Matthew 5, 31-32, Jesus was speaking about more than divorce. Indeed, Jesus was speaking about marriage.

The overarching point that Jesus was making was not about divorce. it was about marriage. And the point that Jesus makes is this.

[10 : 40] Marriage is a holy covenant created and terminated on God's terms, not ours. That's the point that Jesus is making to his disciples about the Pharisees' approach to divorce.

Marriage is a holy covenant created and terminated on God's terms, not ours. In our remaining time, I want to consider how Jesus makes this point.

And I have two simple points this morning, which are drawn from these words of Jesus. The first one, let's consider divorce, divorce, that's prohibited.

Jesus addresses divorce that is prohibited. In verse 31, he said, it was also said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.

Now, who said that? Who is Jesus quoting when he said, it has been said? It was also said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give us a certificate of divorce.

[12:03] But we don't find the answer here in Matthew 5. But we find the answer later in Jesus' ministry, in Matthew chapter 19, verses 3 to 9, where Jesus had an encounter with the Pharisees who sought to test him around the subject of divorce.

it should be projected for you, so you don't need to turn there. Let's go ahead and read what, let's read that account from Matthew 19, 3 to 9.

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause? He answered, have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, said, therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh?

So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. They said to him, why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to send her away.

He said to them, because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning it was not so.

[13:35] And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery. to this passage in Matthew 19, 3-9, greatly helps us to understand the words of Jesus in Matthew 5, 31-32.

First, notice that when Jesus was questioned about divorce by the Pharisees, the answer he gave focused on marriage. He went back to the beginning.

He quoted from Genesis 2, verse 24, which is part of the first scripture that was read this morning. And then they pressed Jesus, and they asked him, well, why did Moses command us to give us a certificate of divorce and then send her away?

And the reason Jesus gave to them why Moses did that, he said, because your hearts were hard, because your hearts were hardened. But exactly what did Moses command the people?

And to appreciate the origin of divorce as we have it in scripture, we need to consider the words of Moses on divorce.

[15:05] And when we look at the first five books of the Old Testament, which are the books of Moses, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, we find divorce mentioned four times.

We find four references to divorce in the writings of Moses. And four of those references, those four references, they occur in one book.

That one book is Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy. And those four references in Deuteronomy occur in two chapters, chapters 22 and 24.

And the four specific verses where divorce is mentioned are Deuteronomy 22, verse 19, Deuteronomy 22, verse 29, Deuteronomy 24, verse 1, and Deuteronomy 24, verse 3.

But this morning, only the passage in Deuteronomy 24 is really relevant to this practice of giving divorce certificates.

[16:17] That's the only place that Moses mentions it. And here's what it says in Deuteronomy 24, 1 to 4. 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 into 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 into 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 our God is giving you for an inheritance.

There are a couple of things we can say about these verses, this regulation that Moses laid down in Israel. The first thing that should be very obvious is Moses does not give these regulations in relation to adultery.

It wasn't adultery. So this reference to some indecent thing, it's not adultery. The reason we know that is because the penalty for adultery was stoning. So Moses wouldn't contradict himself, and in one place say stoning is the penalty for adultery, and then give some other regulation concerning adultery.

He's not addressing adultery in this particular case. What Moses was addressing was the practice of men in that culture at that time, how they were abusing women, treating them as property, and how they were just really trading them back and forth based on their own desires and their own passions.

[18 : 44] And so Moses didn't just say, you know what, let me just write this law in a vacuum. The law was not written in a vacuum. It was written based on what they were doing. And what Moses did was he outlawed what they were doing.

He said, you cannot divorce your wife, and then she goes and becomes someone else's wife, and then because he sends her away, or because he dies, that you're free to take her back.

He says, you cannot do that. That's what they were doing. Moses was not authorizing them to do this. Moses was regulating what they were already doing, and he was telling them, you cannot do this.

So they had this kind of informal practice of how they were handling their marital relations. And women were being traded back and forth.

Now, what was this indecency that is referred to in these four verses in Deuteronomy 24? The indecency was, again, not adultery, but it was something in the realm of some sense or something related to adultery, but not adultery itself.

[20 : 05] It's probably some husband maybe who was just suspicious about his wife. He finds some fault with her. Maybe she talked to another man, or he just finds it intolerable, unthinkable to continue to live with her as his wife.

And so that's the indecent thing. Something caused distrust. Something ruptured the harmony of that relationship and he just couldn't be able to be with her.

And so it was that act in that realm that these words of Moses were based upon. We also see that only men were allowed to divorce their wives from these regulations that Moses laid down.

A woman could demand a divorce. She could nag her husband for divorce, and I imagine some of them did. She could perhaps even do whatever that indecent thing was to cause him to put her away, but she in her own right could not divorce.

And I think it is so easy to see how abuse would have been rampant. And it is so easy to see the depth of our depravity, the depth of our sinfulness, when we consider what God intended, when we consider the state of affairs that existed that required Moses to write this law to protect women to some degree that they would not be traded back and forth and abused in this particular way.

[21 : 53] At that time, divorce was denied to two classes of husbands. And we find this in Deuteronomy 22, which we didn't read this morning, but it's in verses 13 to 21.

Two groups of men could not divorce their wives. The first one was a man who accused his wife of not being a virgin when they got married.

If he did that, that was false. He could never divorce her. And the second was where a man seduced the virgin to whom, well, a virgin who was not engaged to be married.

In that case as well, he had to marry her and he could never divorce her. And in each case, a hefty penalty had to be paid to the father of such women.

But here's the most important observation about the law of Moses on divorce. According to Jesus, Moses allowed it because of sin.

[23 : 05] Moses allowed it because of hard-hearted men. Now, we aren't able to tell from Scripture when this practice of giving a divorce certificate came into play.

But it's easy to see from the regulations that we can see from Moses that obviously it started informally. It started where it was just happening. And you can imagine this woman was married to John.

And next thing you see a wandering and she's no longer in John's house. And you say, what happened to you? Well, he put me away. He put you away? But there was no evidence that she was put away. And so the certificate at some point came into play to regulate that situation where the woman would have a certificate to say, I'm no longer John's wife.

What Moses did by saying to them, look, you can't trade your wife back and forth. It was really intended to slow down the rash decisions of men because they couldn't just be angry, put her out of the house and then bring her back tomorrow, bring her back in a year, or bring her back when the man died.

They had to think it through. And it also involved a process where they had to go before the Levites and they had to write a document, write a certificate, and it had to be validated by the Levites.

[24 : 35] And of course, the Levites were men, so you can imagine all kinds of divorce documents that probably weren't appropriate and valid or allowed just because of those men.

But what this process still did is it allowed men to think because the law was once you put her away, you cannot take her back if she becomes another man's wife.

So that's what Moses taught. Now how did the Pharisees understand what Moses taught? Because there's a huge transmission of time or a lapse of time between when Moses wrote those words and when Jesus is now ministering thousands of years in between.

And we know the Pharisees developed their own laws and became very creative in how they obeyed the law. Well, according to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Encyclopedia, is well known that long before the ministry of Jesus and certainly during the ministry of Jesus, there were two schools of thought on divorce among Jewish rabbis.

One was called Shammai and the other Hillel. Shammai and his followers were conservative and they maintained that something indecent that Moses referred to in Deuteronomy was some physical form of unfaithfulness or actual adultery.

[26 : 21] They maintained that's what it was and that that was the only ground for divorce. Now, although that was in the law of Moses, at the time of Jesus, the Jewish lands were occupied by the Romans and so the Jews did not have the right to put anyone to death.

So that commandment about stoning those who were found in adultery was not carried out. So that's the first group, the school of Shammai.

And now the second is the school of Hillel, this Rabbi Hillel and his disciples. They were liberals. and they were on the other extreme of the divorce issue.

They placed a greater emphasis on the words if he finds no favor, if she finds no favor in his eyes. And they used that to say that divorce could be granted for all kinds of reasons, for the flimsiest of reasons, such as if the wife spoiled the dish by putting in too much seasoning, or she was careless and allowed her to burn.

Some rabbis taught that a husband was perfectly fine in dismissing his wife if he found another woman who was more attractive, who he liked better.

[27 : 50] Here are some other reasons taken from one of their teaching books, the book of Hillel. She who violates the law of Moses, for example, causes her husband to eat food which has not been tithed, that's a ground to divorce her.

She who vows and does not keep her vows, that's a ground to divorce her. She who goes out into the street with her hair loose and spins in the street, or converses or flirts, that means flirts with a man, was a noisy woman, you can divorce her as well.

If some of those laws were enforced today, a lot of women would be divorced for noisiness. It was supposed to be funny. I guess you did not find that funny, and I understand.

It's a heavy topic, and I was trying to lighten it up, but you didn't cooperate with me. What's that? They're too scared to laugh.

Yeah, that's right. They don't want to be noisy. Maybe their husband might decide to put them away. Let me ask you this. So which of these two schools do you think had the most followers?

[29 : 10] The conservative one or the liberal one? The liberal one, they didn't have any problem with disciples.

liberals. I think the conservative one certainly had a problem. And what the liberal ones did was they broadened what Moses sought to narrow.

And they expanded what Moses tried to restrict. They said, if your wife finds no favor in your eyes, according to the law of Moses, write a divorce certificate, put it in her hands, and send her away.

But you cannot take her back if she marries someone else. That was the way they approached it. And this is the erroneous teaching that Jesus was addressing of the Pharisees.

Jesus was saying to his disciples, don't be like them. The way they are treating their wives is wrong. They believe they're not committing adultery by what they're doing.

[30 : 19] But they are committing adultery. Look again at what Jesus says in Matthew 5, 32. 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.

So Jesus prohibited fraudulent divorces. divorce. And he gave one exception for divorce. And all the other reasons that the Pharisees were using were fraudulent.

And this brings me to my second and final point, divorce that's permitted. We'll spend a considerable amount of time on this.

Here in Matthew 5, 32, the ground upon which Jesus said divorce is permitted is sexual immorality. Look closely again at what he says in verse 32. What does he mean by saying if a man divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, he makes her commit adultery.

[31 : 44] Now, first, sexual immorality is a broad word. It includes a range of sexual sins. It includes sexual activity outside of marriage, a range of those sins.

And here, the sin of adultery is what is in view. In Jesus' day, it was a given that when you came to marriage age, male or female, that you got married.

That was a cultural expectation of those in Jewish society. And second, the case of women, in the case of women, generally, marriage was viewed as important for survival.

marriage. It was understood that when a woman got married, her husband cared for her. He took care of her. And that's what the statement of Jesus assumes. It assumes that a woman who was married, if her husband puts her away, if her husband divorces her, some women did go back to their father in shame, but it was a very shameful thing to go back to your father's house after you were married.

So the norm was that women who were divorced would find themselves in another marriage. And they did it primarily as a means of being supported, as a means of being taken care of.

[33 : 16] And Jesus says, if the divorce itself was fraudulent, meaning it was not based on sexual immorality, then the divorcing husband, caused his wife to commit adultery upon her remarriage, which was expected that generally she would do.

And why does adultery arise in remarriage? How does it come about?

How does it come about for the wife who has been put away? How does it come about for the person who marries this wife who has been put away?

Well, here's why. The only reason that adultery can happen is when a person is still married.

Adultery cannot happen in the case of a person who is not married.

married. The Bible calls that fornication. But in the case of a person who is married, adultery results when they get married.

[34 : 37] And so what we see is that a husband merely putting his wife away and giving her a certificate of divorce that is not on the basis of marital unfaithfulness, that she has committed adultery, that in and of itself does not break the marriage bond.

That in and of itself doesn't mean that because he did that that all of a sudden she ceases to be his wife. In Matthew 5, 31 to 32 Jesus tells us that divorce that comes about for any reason other than sexual immorality does not end that marriage in the eyes of God.

Brothers and sisters, I know that this might be hard for some of us to hear this morning but this nonetheless is God's word.

The only ground that Jesus gives for divorce is sexual morality, not suspected sexual immorality, not I had a dream about my husband and on that basis I'm going to divorce him or my wife, not incompatibility, not irreconcilable differences, not mental cruelty, not the myriad of things, things that have been added as to reasons why divorce is allowable.

And here I'm not interacting with what the state does, what the state does is what the state does. But this is the word of God, this is what Jesus says, and please hear me this morning, I'm not minimizing to the least the other kinds of problems in marriage that so many people face, I'm not minimizing them.

[36 : 40] But I'm simply echoing the words of Jesus by saying that they're not biblical grounds for divorce. Now Jesus didn't say anything about the man who fraudulently divorced his wife in verse 32.

He only talks about the woman and that the man causes her to commit adultery and whoever marries her commits adultery. But what about the man? Well obviously if the woman by virtue of remarriage commits adultery, then it means that likewise for the man.

If he were to remarry, he would commit adultery because his fraudulent divorce did not end his marriage.

Again, brothers and sisters, what Jesus does in these two verses is he makes a statement about marriage. He's teaching about marriage. And the statement is that marriage is a holy covenant created and terminated on God's terms, not ours.

And we can't force his hand, brothers and sisters. It is the joining of a man and a woman in a one flesh covenant before God.

[38 : 03] And this is what it says in Genesis 2, 24. Therefore, shall a man leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh.

Jesus is teaching us that marriage is not a casual relationship that we enter into and exit based on our selfish and sinful reasons.

Instead, it's a covenant of oneness. oneness. And the only thing that breaks that covenant of oneness is marital and faithfulness.

And therefore, he calls us to be faithful in our marriage. Now, that some of you are wondering about a remarriage that has taken place after divorce, not based on biblical grounds.

And I'm sure one of the questions that arises in our minds is what should a person do? What should people do who have gone through an unbiblical divorce and they have remarried?

[39 : 13] But one obvious thing that they should not do is to divorce the person that they are currently married to and seek to marry the person they were formerly married to, the person they divorced.

Moses laid that out saying you aren't able to go back and forth and traffic in those relationships that you had before and Jesus did not address that particular part.

But that would clearly be against this regulation that we see as to the reason that Moses put them in in the first place, that you aren't able to put away your spouse and then go back and marry that person once they've entered into another relationship.

But this is a point that theologians differ on. They differ in the view as to whether the remarriage, that act of remarrying, whether that is an act of adultery or whether it puts the parties in a state of perpetual adultery.

Theologians are divided on both sides of the issue and it's something I have wrestled with for many years. For those who believe that remarriage is an act of adultery, the remedy would be then to confess that sin and demonstrate repentance by being faithful in the remarriage.

[40 : 50] And for those who believe that the act of remarriage is perpetual adultery, then the remedy for them would be that you have to divorce the person that you remarried to get out of the state of perpetual adultery.

And somebody even saying you go back and marry the other person, which is not always an option because the other person may not want to marry you.

Again, this is something I've wrestled with over many years. And based on the teaching of scriptures, I understand it, I've come to the conclusion that remarriage after an unbiblical divorce is an act of adultery rather than perpetual adultery.

But brothers and sisters, whatever our varied circumstances are this morning, how do you hear these words of Jesus? Whether you're single, whether you're married, this is God's word and he speaks to all of us.

And if you are married this morning, and especially men, because Jesus was primarily addressing men in this part of the Sermon on the Mount, what's your attitude towards your marriage and towards your spouse?

[42 : 27] Is it one of permanent fidelity? Or are we going the way of the culture?

Are we modern-day Pharisees divorcing our wives for all kinds of reasons and then trying to varnish it with something that looks spiritual?

Will we accept the narrow road that Jesus gives us? It's not a broad road, it's a narrow road. Or will we give ourselves a broader road in the way that the Pharisees did it by covering it up with some kind of a certificate of divorce?

The Pharisees were pleasing themselves and the question to us this morning is who are we going to please? Are we going to please ourselves? Are we going to please the Lord? We need to please the Lord and to please Him we need to be faithful in our marriages.

And here's the truth, even when unfaithfulness happens in marriage, Scripture does not mandate, Scripture does not demand that divorce takes place.

[43 : 52] God's best is forgiveness. God's best is forgiveness. And sometimes when adultery takes place in marriage, even though it can be forgiven, sometimes we can so easily just use it as something to capitalize on and take what we consider a biblical divorce as an opportunity to simply get out of the marriage.

Those of you this morning who are single, this is a narrow road. The Lord Jesus calls us to enter marriage with the understanding that it is a one flesh union, a one flesh union that God puts together and the word is that no one separate.

adultery. I can tell you this morning from many years of counseling with couples, some of the greatest pains you will know, some of the greatest pains you will experience are relational pains, and in particular the pains that come from marital breakdown as a result adultery.

And so I encourage you to embrace God's word on relationships, to see marriage as a gift, because it is a gift, and it is more than just a bunch of rules and restrictions. It is a gift from God.

It is the closest thing that we'll enjoy on this earth to something that is heavenly bliss. That was God's intention for us.

[45 : 55] As I conclude this morning, I just want to say the purpose of this sermon was not to answer every single possible question that might come in your mind.

I imagine that there are questions, but the purpose was instead to get us to hear fresh the words of Jesus about the enduring nature of marriage and how those who follow him are called to be faithful to their spouses.

I imagine some of you are wondering about the 1 Corinthians 7 passage that talks about desertion and rather Jesus and Paul are contradicting one another. No, they're not contradicting one another. They were addressing two very different issues. Paul was addressing a situation where an unbelieving spouse departs from a believing spouse who wants that unbelieving spouse to remain and the unbelieving spouse departs.

Jesus wasn't addressing that. Paul was addressing desertion in that way and what he said in such a case where the unbelieving spouse departs from the believing spouse, the believing spouse is not bound in such a case.

[47 : 08] But if you have lingering questions this morning, I'm happy to talk with you about them. You can email me or just pull me aside. You can set a time to talk and if I get enough questions, I may just decide to do a special session where we can come together and we can just talk about those questions and everyone will have the benefit of hearing them.

Last night as I was concluding my preparation, I got an email from Pastor Rob Elliott and he informed me of Pastor Alan Lee's passing.

And to hear that his dear wife Nancy passed away was sad. But I was reminded of the Lord's providence in all of it that I got that email because I remembered being at a retreat and hearing Pastor Lee talk about marriage and hearing and hearing him talk about his love for his wife.

And I'll never forget, as I listened to Alan Lee that evening, I said, if I ever in my pastoral ministry came to a place where I was dealing with a couple that I could not make progress with in counseling, I would send them to that man because of his commitment to marriage and the commitment that I heard that he made to his wife.

And so when I got that email last night, I couldn't help but remember that retreat where Pastor Lee spoke so highly of his wife and how he loved his wife.

[49 : 08] But more closer to home, that's when I reflected on my brother-in-law Williams left for my sister early. He loved my sister.

He was faithful to my sister. He kept his vows in sickness and in health till death do his part. I had a front row seat to that.

and I've said, many of you have heard me say it, when it comes to marriage, he's my hero, of a man who loved his wife.

I remember a number of years ago, I was at a conference and I was going to this conference like the second time and I noticed that one of the pastors there was not with his wife and I asked one of the brothers, I said, what happened?

I don't see his wife and he sadly told me that the wife had gotten cancer and that man divorced her. And it was just heartbreaking to hear that.

[50 : 25] I've heard other stories like that and that's why William's example is one that I think we should all emulate about the commitment that God calls us to in our marriages to our wives.

William has modeled that for us. But brothers and sisters, beyond Alan Lee's example, beyond William's example, we have Christ's example.

When we come to Christ, we become a part of the bride of Christ. we become a part of his church. And he tells us up front, I will never leave you, I will never forsake you, I will be with you to the end of the age.

Brothers and sisters, there's nothing that we can do when we belong to Christ that will cause him to abandon us and to put us away.

Fellow married brothers, when scripture calls us to love our wives, scripture calls us to love our wives the way Christ loved the church, that he gave himself up for her, that he sacrificed himself for her.

[51 : 54] He is our ultimate example. people. And it becomes easier for us to love our wives and to forgive our wives when we remember how much Christ loves us and how much he has forgiven us and how much he does not abandon us.

love our wives. And the truth is we will never love our wives the way Christ loves us.

It is a daily endeavor to continue to do it and to continue to do it until the day we die and we know that we will fall short to some degree. But it is an endeavor nonetheless, a lifelong endeavor that he calls us to.

fellow married brothers, let us by the grace of God. And hear me this morning. We cannot do this in our own strength.

No amount of determination, no amount of discipline can cause us to love our wives and to be faithful to them and to forgive them.

[53 : 03] but the grace of God that has come to us in Jesus Christ will enable us to do what Christ has called us to do, to love our wives the way Christ loved the church.

And we have daily opportunities to do it. We have all kinds of opportunities to lay our lives down for them, to seek their best interests, to serve them, to nurture them, to cherish them, to love them.

And may God help us all to do that. Let's pray. Well, Father, thank you for the gift of marriage.

Thank you that you gave us a one flesh union. Thank you that you gave us a one flesh union. I pray, oh Lord, that you would help us by the grace of God to seek to be faithful, faithful husbands, faithful wives, to the honor and glory of your great name.

Amen. Lord, I pray for those who are experiencing marital troubles.

[54 : 40] Lord, would you speak to them and their situation, the peace that only you can. Would you open their eyes and envision them to what is possible with God?

And Father, would you help them more than anything else to desire to please you and not please themselves?

Would you bless marriages, Lord? And would you help us to live day by day projecting marriages that seek to honor you to a watching world?

We pray and ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.