



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

## SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS



## Divorce Court

Tim Badal | January 12, 2014 | Matthew 5:31-32

The Upside-down Kingdom Series, Lessons Learned from the Sermon on the Mount, Part 13

Take God's Word in your hands and turn to the book of Matthew. We are in a lengthy series looking at the greatest sermon ever preached: "The Sermon on the Mount" preached by Jesus Christ Himself. In His sermon Jesus clearly articulates the demands He has for those who call themselves Christians. In the first part of our series we looked at what our "Kingdom Attitudes" should be, based on the first twelve verses of Jesus' sermon. In this section the Beatitudes teach us what it means to have an attitude like Christ Jesus.

We are now in the second part of our series and are looking at the "Kingdom Actions" that should flow from our "Kingdom Attitudes." Living in the Kingdom isn't just a mindset; it's also living out those attitudes in actions and truly being the salt and light of the world. As we have looked at these actions, we have seen Jesus restructuring the calling of His believers. He calls us to live very differently from the way the Pharisees of His day were teaching. The Kingdom lifestyle Jesus calls us to require us to radically change the way we approach things like anger and lust.

In the weeks to come we will be talking about:

- Commitments and oaths.
- Revenge and retaliation.
- Loving our enemies as God has loved us.

Each time, Jesus is going to turn our worldview upside-down. That's why this series is called "An Upside-down Kingdom." If we look at these issues from a worldly perspective we would say, "What Jesus says is completely contrary to what we know in our own society and time."

Our text for today is no different. There is no greater place for Him to call us to some upside-down living than in Matthew 5:31-32, because He speaks on the issues of divorce and marriage.

Here at Village Bible Church we love spending most of our time studying the Scriptures in a systematic, verse-by-verse way. So if you have come for the first time today and you think, "The first time I come to church they're going to judge people that have been divorced," then I want you to know that we've come to this text objectively because it is the next part of our passage. We have been studying the Sermon on the Mount for several months. So if you're saying, "Why does Tim need to talk about divorce? Doesn't he know that's a sensitive subject matter and those who have been divorced are going to feel really hot under the

collar?" just realize that when you preach the Bible verse-by-verse, someone will inevitably feel hot under the collar every week.

As we approach this subject, we need to recognize that it might be hitting closer to home. But there were some who felt the pressure before when we talked about the subject of lust. There were others who felt the pressure before that when we talked about the issue of anger. We all deal with different issues and will be sensitive in different areas.

This issue of divorce is one that rips at the heart of every human being. One study says that the emotional duress coming from a divorce is equal to the grief from the death of a loved one. Studies tell us that in a group this size that the vast majority of us have been impacted in one way, shape or form by a divorce. Many of us have experienced firsthand the flood of emotions coming from such an ordeal. I want to acknowledge the pain and sorrow divorce brings and sympathize with all who are hurting from it. Yet amidst that pain and sorrow, we must also recognize that God saw fit to speak to this issue. Jesus saw it as an important issue in His day and it is in our day as well.

Now you might think, "Why does the church need to talk about divorce? Aren't we all wonderful, happy, smiling people who are happily married?" A Barna Group study recently found that 27% of non-denominational evangelical church attenders are divorced. That is a couple percentage points higher than the national average of non-believers.

So how did we get here? How did we get to a place where divorce would be such a rampant thing in our society and even in our churches? I would say that we've made marriage something far short of what God intended it to be. We have thrown out the Creator's guidebook to the joy and contentment found in the companionship of marriage. We have said, "There are many different ways we can form a family." We've made marriage into something worthless to be thrown away.

We have done this a couple of different ways. Right now the Mexican legislature is redefining the duration of marriage. There is a bill in the legislature that aims to shorten the time for a marriage to take place. So if this law passes a young couple will go to get a marriage license and they will at that moment determine how long they are going to remain married to one another. They will set a term of marriage.

For example, if Amanda and I were a young couple going to get married, we would say, "Okay, how long do we think we can stay true to these vows? Three years? Four years? I think maybe ten years." The term of marriage would be determined based on what the husband and wife determine. Then the marriage license—like many other kinds of licenses—would run out and need to be renewed. So that's one way the world is trying to redefine marriage. This goes against God's Word.

The idea of redefining marriage and who is part of a marriage is alive and well in our country today. It is an ongoing issue in state legislature and for the nation. We hear about it every day in the news.

But let me tell you, Hollywood has already moved on from the issue of same-sex marriage. Hollywood has moved on to something else. I was watching TV yesterday and saw a trailer for the new movie [Her](#) that is

being acclaimed as “the picture of the year.” I wanted to vomit by the time this trailer was done. This movie is in theatres now and has some big names in it. It’s a story about a man who has recently gotten divorced and is now looking to find a new love. He meets all kinds of people but cannot find love. Around that same time a new computer technology comes out—an operating system that learns who you are, all of your dreams, your desires, your aspirations, your schedule and all of that. It literally becomes everything from your alarm clock to your day planner to your companion. The main character starts saying he can’t find human love and he falls in love with his computer.

You might laugh and ask, “Well, how could that be?” but they do not make it a comedy. It is an absolute love story. The absolutely grotesque part is when the main character takes a friend and uses her as a surrogate to have physical intimacy with the computer. At the end of the trailer, the main character says, “I loved you like I never loved anyone else.”

Are you kidding me? Is this how far we have fallen regarding marriage? It’s not even the issue of same-sex marriage anymore—which we’ve addressed over and over again—but now we’re talking about marrying computers. If this is where we are, then we are in a sad place. Hollywood is doing a terrible thing to the issue of marriage. If I were God looking down at the absolute stupidity of man, I would have destroyed us all a long time ago. I’m not pointing at anybody in particular; I’m saying this about all of us—the whole human race.

You might say, “This is only a current problem,” but Jesus makes it abundantly clear that the issue of marriage wasn’t something that started falling apart 15 or 20 years ago. It didn’t start when America took on the “no-fault” divorce. Divorce was an issue in the first-century Jewish culture that was just as passionate and combative as it is today. We need Jesus’ teaching on marriage and the epidemic that’s destroying this God-given covenant.

So I’m asking that you would humbly open your hearts to the Word of God. We come to this issue with so many presuppositions. We already have our position. Now you’re going to hear your pastor’s position and I’m going to tell you, some of you will probably become angry and want to leave. I can see your responses in your faces and I have already seen people in the past who are not happy with my position on this issue. I’m not looking for sympathy. I know what the Word of God says and I’m going to stand on it. If you don’t like it take it up with my Boss.

So here is what I want you to do. I want you to grab your pen, a piece of paper and the Word of God. If you have a hard time looking through the Bible, don’t worry because I’m going to give you the Scriptures. If you’re going to argue with anybody about this issue I want you to argue with the Bible, not me. I’m going to back up everything I say with Scripture so that you can objectively understand what the Bible says. Let’s begin by looking at our passage in the Sermon on the Mount, [Matthew 5:31-32](#). We’ll read the passage and then ask for God’s blessing on our time. Here’s what our King, Lord and Savior Jesus says on this very difficult subject matter:

<sup>31</sup> “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ <sup>32</sup> 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.”

Let's pray.

Lord, how could two verses cause so much consternation in the world and in the House of God? We want to hear from You so I pray that I would become less and You would become more. Let me decrease so that You may increase and the people of God may hear from their Lord and not another man. To You be the glory, honor and praise for what is shared here tonight. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

As we work through our outline, I want you to follow along and write down the passages that I share with you. Time is not my friend so I'm going to jump right into our outline. To understand Jesus' teaching on divorce, we must:

## **Recall a Confrontation Surrounding Divorce**

## **Understand the Circumstances that Allow for Remarriage**

## **Recognize the Bible's Teaching Regarding the Specific Context**

### **1. We Must Recall a Confrontation Surrounding Divorce**

If we want to understand Jesus' teaching concerning divorce and remarriage, we must first recall a confrontation surrounding divorce. You might say, "Tim, there is no confrontation in [Matthew 5](#). Jesus is talking and people are listening. There's no debate. Nobody's questioning Him." However, a confrontation is established in Jesus' wording. Notice the opening words of [verse 31](#), "*It was also said.*" This is the third of six confronting statements Jesus makes in this section of the sermon:

1. [Verse 21](#) says, "*You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder.'*"
2. [Verse 27](#) says, "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'*"
3. [Verse 31](#) says, "*It was also said...*"
4. [Verse 33](#) says, "*Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely.'*"
5. [Verse 38](#) says, "*You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'*"
6. [Verse 43](#) says, "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'*"

Jesus is repeatedly saying, "You've heard something preached and taught to you but I'm going to reorder it. I'm restructuring it because what you have been taught is wrong." Jesus is saying, "It's unfitting for a follower of Mine to live according to the teaching of the rabbis and Pharisees."

This is clearly seen in the issue of divorce. When Jesus spoke to this issue people undoubtedly perked up as people are perking up while they listen today. Jesus' listeners knew what the popular rabbis were saying, so they wanted to know what this new Jesus would say. He's done some pretty cool things up to this point and become incredibly popular, so where does He stand on this issue? If we want to understand this better, we have to ask, "What was the culture of the times?"

## **This Confrontation Involved Understanding the Culture of the Times**

In first-century Israel there were two prevailing thoughts surrounding the issue of divorce. The first one was by the popular rabbi Hillel. Hillel said that a man could divorce his wife for any reason. When I say any reason, I mean any reason. The secular historian Josephus summed up Hillel's position by saying that a Jewish man could divorce his wife if she burned his breakfast or if she said something mean about his mother. You can't talk about a man's mother that way so he could pursue divorce. If the man no longer thought his wife was beautiful, he could get a certificate of divorce. Hillel said, "Just make sure that when you get a divorce, dot all your I's and cross all your T's. Get that bill of divorcement right. That's the important thing. Do your due diligence with the certificate and then you can divorce whomever and whenever you want." That's all you have to do. It was the first no-fault divorce. Really it was "her-fault" divorce. The teaching of Rabbi Hillel is alive and well in America today. Just get the bill of divorce. We make a big deal about saying, "You can't have more than one wife at a time, so make sure you get the bill of divorce."

There was another camp in Jesus' day under the rabbi Shammai. Shammai was a little more conservative. He said that divorce could take place only on the grounds of adultery. So you could get a certificate of divorce if you found out that your wife had committed adultery.

So these two groups would argue with one another. Then Jesus gives His position on things. He's already said, "I'm not here to abolish the Law but to fulfill the Law. Here's how I fulfill the Law with some of the main issues of the day."

## **This Confrontation Involved Understanding the Context of the Law's Teaching**

Before we blindly dive into this debate, we need to understand the context of the Law's teaching. A lot of us blindly dive into this debate because we think, "I don't agree with Hillel but I agree with Shammai. Sexual immorality—adultery—nullifies the marriage." Before you say that you have to ask the question, "Where is this debate stemming from?"

Turn in your Bibles to the Book of Deuteronomy. We're going to look at Deuteronomy 24:1. I want you to turn there because I don't want you just to take my word for it. I want you to see what Scripture says because the crux of the debate between Hillel, Shammai—and now Jesus—is, "How do you interpret Deuteronomy 24:1?"

Deuteronomy 24:1 says, "*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.*" Let's just pause there. We'll get to the rest of that section of Scripture in a moment.

The question that Hillel and Shammai are dealing with—and now Jesus too—is "What does Deuteronomy 24:1 mean when it speaks of a husband finding no favor in his wife because of some indecency?" That's the crux of the matter: what does indecency involve? Hillel said it's whatever has made the husband unhappy. Shammai said that indecency meant adultery. This might come to a surprise to you but I think Jesus

disagrees completely with both rabbis. If we affirm one or the other of the rabbis our application to the issue of marriage and divorce will be completely flawed. That is why Jesus is in disagreement with both.

Let's see if Jesus agrees with Hillel. We see right away that He doesn't because He says, "Anyone who divorces his wife and remarries another causes their spouse to commit adultery." Then He adds "*except on the grounds of sexual immorality.*" Right away He has harnessed Hillel's teaching and said, "Hillel, you're wrong. The popular preacher of the day is wrong because it has to be on the grounds of sexual immorality." So then the Shammai people think, "Yay! Jesus is with us. We can follow Shammai because Jesus agrees with Shammai." Jesus follows no one. Jesus is the King. People follow Him. Jesus is going to show us that He does not agree with Shammai either.

Now that is going to be hard for some of you to hear because you are saying, "Wait a minute! I have always understood that adultery nullifies the marriage covenant." I would ask the question, "Where?" As we look at [Deuteronomy 24](#) we have to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. So turn for a moment to [Leviticus 20:10](#) which says, "*If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.*"

Now go back to Deuteronomy. [Deuteronomy 22:22](#) tells us, "*If a man is found lying with the wife of another man [not just your neighbor but any man], both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel.*" We have already established that Hillel is wrong. Now we're examining Shammai's interpretation of indecency as adultery. By the way, all sexual activity—no matter what it is—of a married person outside the marriage covenant is adultery. Let me make this clear since it wasn't too long ago that we had a president say, "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is." "Is" means all sexual activity, which means kissing, carousing and all of that is a form of adultery for the married individual. All sexual activity in marriage is to be between a husband and his wife, case closed.

So if we believe Jesus is agreeing with Shammai because of the exception clause, "except for sexual immorality," then the Jewish people who read [Deuteronomy 24](#) are going to stop and say, "Wait a minute Moses, you just told us in [Leviticus 20:10](#) and [Deuteronomy 22:22](#) that if someone commits adultery, they are dead. Now you say in [Deuteronomy 24:1](#) that they're not dead because you say to write them a certificate of divorce." Do you see the double speak that would be going on here? If adultery is the grounds for divorce, then there's no reason for a bill of divorce because the spouse is dead and you can remarry then. How do you give a dead person divorce papers? That's silly. The covenant is done. There is no need for divorce papers.

So then what in the world does [Deuteronomy 24:1-4](#) mean? The only way we can understand is to look at the culture of the day. We often try to understand the Biblical text according to our American culture and times but when we do that we're doing a disservice to the Scriptures. We need to look at the Biblical text according to the culture and time of those days to truly understand.

As many of you know, my dad comes from Iraq and so my family is familiar with many Middle Eastern traditions that are very similar to those of Judaism. Within the marriage covenant there was a time called the betrothal—or the engagement—period. In America, we have made that absolutely nothing. To us, engagement is glorified dating. It gives the bride and groom some time to put a really nice party together.

In a Middle Eastern culture—and in the Jewish culture of Jesus' day—the engagement began the marriage but it was in parentheses.

So what would happen then—and what happens in Middle Eastern cultures today and even in some African cultures—is that the groom would find someone he likes. He would take his father with him and go to the bride's father and say, "I have put my eyes upon your daughter and I want her to be my wife."

The dad of the bride would say, "That sounds great. How are you going to prove to me that you are going to be a capable husband? I'm going to release my providing, nurturing and caring for this girl and put her in your hands. So you're going to have to prove to me that you're able to do this."

One way the groom would do this is say, "We're going to come into a contract." So the father of the groom, the groom and the father of the bride would come together and say, "If A, B, C and X, Y, Z are accomplished and you come back and show me proof of those things being done, I will give you my daughter as your wife." One of the first things a Jewish couple does when they get married—and it's still true today—is sign a *ketubah*. A *ketubah* is a marriage contract. The *ketubah* is once and for all ratified on the day of the marriage ceremony but it is begun and written up on the day of the engagement.

Jesus talks about this over and over again. One of the first things that would be a part of any *ketubah* at that time would be for the man to go and prepare a place for his wife to have a home. Does that sound familiar? "For I go to prepare a place for you and once that place is prepared I will come back and take you to be with me always." Jesus is speaking in [John 14](#) as a bridegroom. He is saying, "I am in an engagement place with you as the church. I'm going to my Father's house and preparing the house for you. When it's done I'm going to come back and get you."

The *ketubah* would be a time anywhere from 6-18 months that would be the time of engagement. The groom would give his best friend—the best man the responsibility of preparing his bride. In our culture, all the best man has to do is throw a party for the groom and hold the ring during the ceremony. But back then, the best man was the trusted friend of the groom and he was left to guarantee that the bride was prepared and fulfilled her side of the contract when the groom came for her.

In the opening chapters of [John](#), Jesus says that His best man was John the Baptist. He was preparing the bride for the coming of the Groom. Jesus uses this betrothal language all the time. With the *ketubah*, the groom would come back at a time unknown to the bride and her family. He would come with the blowing of horns and the shouts of people. Again, we hear Jesus say to His bride, "I'm coming back for you with the sound of the trumpet and with the voices of many angels. I'm coming back at a time that you don't know and you better be ready."

The job of the bride was to be ready at all times. She never knew when her groom was going to come. She needed to be prepared. So she would gather a group of maids around her so that at a moment's notice—when they heard the clamor, "The groom has come!"—the bride could say, "I need help! My hair needs to be done. I need to be perfumed. I need to be readied because by the time my groom gets in the door I better be ready for him."

Do you see all of the eschatological connections that the betrothal period brings? In [Matthew 5](#), Jesus is referring to that time when the groom comes to the house of the bride. The best man might come to the groom and say, "Before you fulfill the last aspect of this marital contract, you need to know that your fiancé has been sleeping around. She's had men coming and going. She's been acting immodestly and I just want you to know that before you sign off and consummate the contract."

This is where our culture is very different. We consummate the marriage after the marriage ceremony. We call that the honeymoon. In Jesus' day—and in Middle Eastern culture today—the ratifying of that *ketubah* was the sexual union between the husband and wife which happened when the groom came to the house of the woman. They would say, "The groom has come. He has come to take his bride." He would take her into the bedroom chamber while everybody's waiting—a little freaky, right? Then he would come out and say one of two things, "She's been with someone," or "She has been decent, wholesome and good. I take her as my wife." It was from that point on that what God—in the presence of witnesses—had put together no man could separate.

Now you might say, "Wait a minute, Tim. Give me some proof of this." Turn in your Bibles to [Matthew 1](#). Why in the world does Jesus give this exception clause if adultery does not nullify the marriage and cause grounds for divorce? Here's what we need to understand about the Christmas story. [Verses 18-19](#), "*Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together...*" That means before they had consummated. The *ketubah* had been signed. Joseph was engaged to his bride Mary. Sometime during that betrothal period before Joseph had covenanted with her by consummation of sexual union, "*she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.*"

You are probably thinking, "Now wait a minute! They're not married yet." Ah ha! To get out of a betrothal contract meant you had to present a certificate of divorce to the father of the bride. Why is a certificate of divorce needed? She hasn't committed adultery; she's committed fornication. She has committed sexual activity outside of the marriage bond. Those of us who are unmarried right now and are engaged in sexual activity, that's not adultery—that's fornication. It's sexual immorality.

So Joseph—a just man—said, "I'm going to divorce her. I'm going to do what the Law allows. Deuteronomy 24:1 says I can divorce her." Why is he called a righteous man? Because not only did he live by the Law but he was also gracious. He said, "I'll do it quietly. I'm not going to make a public spectacle of my fiancé. She has obviously made a terrible decision. She's gotten pregnant and therefore I am going to divorce her."

Notice what the Scriptures go on to say in [Matthew 1:20-22](#):

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife...

Now wait a minute, he's going to divorce her even though she's not his wife yet because they haven't consummated yet.

...for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Now let's go back to [Matthew 5:31-32](#). Jesus is articulating that according to the Mosaic Law you may only get divorced in the following situation: if you are in the betrothal period and you find that your spouse has

been unfaithful. Only then were you permitted by the law of Moses to write a certificate of divorce for that person. Jesus says that if you divorce for any other reason, you make your spouse commit adultery and whomever he or she remarries also commits adultery.

## **This Confrontation Involved Understanding the Real Cause of Divorce**

Now we have to ask the question, "So where does divorce come from?" In [Matthew 19](#) we see the cause of divorce is the hardness of man's heart. It's sin. Any time we approach divorce, we are going outside of the will and plan of God which is marriage once and for all. When we pursue divorce—for any reason—we're choosing selfishness over sacrifice. We're choosing enjoyment instead of endurance.

Now you might say, "Wait a minute Tim. I'm still not okay with this issue because it says, 'Except for sexual immorality.' I've got to be able to divorce my spouse if they go and sleep with someone else." Let's look at the text to understand what the original text says, *"But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality..."* That is the Greek word *porneia*. It is the most generic and broad word for sexual immorality in the Greek. So Jesus says, "If anyone divorces except on the ground of *porneia*, [he] makes her commit adultery." That word adultery is the Greek word *moicheuō*. So this is how the original text would read, *"...except on the ground of porneia, makes her commit moicheuō, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits moicheuō."*

Let's stop here for a moment. You are probably thinking, "Okay Tim, you're saying that adultery does not give grounds for divorce." That's exactly what I'm saying. *Porneia* was used in very broad terms to mean any form of sexual immorality. It's where we get the words prostitute and pornography. Here's the problem. If we believe that sexual immorality causes adultery and adultery is grounds for divorce, go back just a couple of verses to [Matthew 5:27-28](#), *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*

If Jesus is saying that adultery is grounds for divorce, then based on His words in [verses 27-28](#) He has basically just said, "Everybody can get divorced." When we studied those verses, we determined that there are probably very few people in this world who have not lusted after another person at some time or in some place. Jesus has already condemned them and said, "That lustful thought is adultery itself." Therefore Amanda is fully able to divorce me because lust has been in my background. I'm comfortable confessing that to you.

Here's the other problem. Once we say that sexual immorality is grounds for divorce then we have to define that sexual immorality. Is it unrepentant sexual immorality? Is it a one-time act? Is it multiple times? Jesus never defines that. So for us to say, "It means unrepentant sexual immorality" means that we are going outside of Scripture and defining something that Jesus said on our own terms.

Jesus gives no clarification as to what He is addressing with sexual immorality, but if we go back to [Deuteronomy 24](#) and put it within the betrothal period, everything's fine. Marriage is between a man and woman for all of life and the only opportunity you have for divorce is to divorce your engaged spouse

within the betrothal context because a man is commanded not to divorce his wife. So we see that the real cause for divorce is the hardness of man's heart.

## **This Confrontation Involved Understanding Our Savior's Celebration of Marriage**

Turn back to Matthew 19 for a moment. When Jesus is pushed into the divorce debate, He articulates something that we need to recognize. Matthew 19:3-6 it says:

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"

That's the Hillel idea. We want to have this game about when we can divorce and when we can't. For the world, that totally makes sense. But it makes no sense at all for believers because what we are doing is the opposite of what Jesus does. Notice how He answers:

He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

So the people say, "Okay Jesus, what do You say about divorce?"

He says, "It doesn't happen. What God puts together let no man separate."

We need to understand a couple of things about Jesus' celebration of marriage. Whenever people want to talk about divorce Jesus wants to talk about marriage. Here are some things He tells us about marriage:

1. There are two specific partners: male and female. It isn't male and a computer, male and male or female and female. Male and female. Some people think, "But Jesus doesn't talk about homosexuality." Bologna! The Bible says, "He created them male and female. A man will leave his house and make his wife with him one flesh."

You need to understand that the Bible is clear on the issue of same-sex marriage. It is clear that marriage is for a man and a woman for a lifetime. By the way, if you ever thought I would run for political office, I'm already done. You can't say that and think you're going to win an election these days. So I'll just stick with being a pastor.

2. It is pivotal to the family. Think about it. I have three sons and someday my three sons are going to come after your daughters. They're going to come to you and say, "Mr. So and So, I think your daughter is pretty neat. I want to take her from you make a family of myself out of her."

Think about that. That is a violent thing! "I'm stealing your daughter." People ask me why I don't own guns. It's because I have three sons. If I had three daughters, then I would have three guns. Taking a man's daughter to start a new family is a violent thing. Fathers of daughters, it should be a jealous thing of yours. You have invested into that girl's life since birth and the question is, "Who is this guy?" You should have a hundred questions for him. You should question him long and hard, "Who are you? You're coming and taking the girl that I've invested all my time and energy in to start a family of your own. That's stealing!"

But the Bible says marriage is a good thing. Why? If there isn't that agreed upon stealing, then the family becomes a swamp. No one comes and goes. When the mom and dad on both sides do a good job of preparing these children for marriage and the marriage is done right, then the joy of grandchildren comes. Then in the twilight years of your life you can have the joy of celebrating and sharing in the goodness of a new marriage. Seeing that my marriage has created the opportunity for more marriages is a beautiful and wonderful legacy. That is a beautiful legacy of every marriage.

3. It is to be passionate. Jesus says that the two will become one flesh. Jesus is alluding to the sexual union between a husband and wife. For those of you in a cold and sexless marriage who think you are fulfilling God's covenant, you have another think coming. The Bible says you need to be involved in that sexual union no matter what your age or situation. I realize there are a lot of implications here, but the Bible says that a good Christian marriage is a sexual one. The husband and wife are going to be passionate with one another.
4. It is a permanent relationship. What God has joined together let no man separate. Here's the thing. We understand why the world doesn't care about what God says. But why do we as Christians come up with all these reasons to allow for a "biblical divorce"? Why would we say, "What God put together let no man separate **except for...**"? Once you allow one exception then you've made something that was permanent not permanent at all. The church is going down the same road that the world has. Here's the hypocrisy of the church: we don't care about divorce but now we care a great deal about same-sex marriage. We're upset that the world is redefining marriage, but we redefined marriage a long time ago. The church did it right along with the world.

That is why we take divorce very seriously here at Village Bible Church. To be a member of this church you have to sign a commitment with the other members of this church to commit to several things. One of those things is to commit to the preservation of marriage above all else. If a member of this church breaks that commitment, he or she will come under church discipline.

Right now there is a man in this church who is under church discipline. After a year of trying to convince him to not leave his wife and children to pursue another relationship, we brought him before you publicly and told him that he could no longer be in fellowship here until he repents. Maybe you think that sounds harsh, but we take this issue very seriously. Do you think that's legalistic? If so, take that up with God. God says, "Man shall not separate from his wife."

Maybe you are thinking, "That's not very nice. Aren't we all sinners?" Yes, we are. So when I live in unrepentant sin I should be held accountable. I should be disciplined. That is why we take this incredibly seriously.

So when I talk about this issue of divorce, I'm not necessarily talking to everybody. As a non-member of this church you can do whatever you want. You've committed nothing to us. We're glad you're here, we love you and you're a Christian. We have no question about that, but you haven't committed anything to us so you can come and go as you please. But the members of our church have made a decision of their own volition to say, "We agree that every follower of Jesus Christ should commit to these sixteen things."

We are saying, "I know I'm prone to wander so I am asking my fellow members to hold me accountable." That's what church membership is. We are asking each other to hold us accountable. So I speak now to the members of this church and I tell you that there is no place for you to pursue divorce. To lead in the divorce proceedings would be to go against everything that the Bible says about being a child of God and how we ought to live.

## **2. We Must Understand the Circumstances that Allow for Remarriage**

So what are circumstances that allow for remarriage? The Bible speaks of two circumstances.

### **Death of a Spouse**

According to 1 Corinthians 7:39-40, if a woman's husband dies she is able to remarry. "*She is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.*" So that means if I die Amanda can get remarried. Nobody has any issue with that.

### **Destruction of the Marriage through Remarriage**

Some people may say, "If adultery doesn't end the marriage then surely divorce does." There's a problem with that idea. If my spouse chooses to divorce me for whatever reason then my job is to pursue reconciliation. But what if my spouse chooses to go and marry another? "Where does that put me?" Go back to Deuteronomy 24. We have to read the rest of the passage. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 says the following:

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 (so there's a second husband now) 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.

If your spouse leaves you for a divorce you still have an opportunity for reconciliation. Divorce is merely a legal separation between a man and woman; it does not destroy the marriage. What does destroy the marriage is if one of the spouses dies or if one spouse takes on a new spouse.

These are some important words for those who are in a second marriage right now. Your second marriage is just as binding as the first one was. The question has been asked, "I'm a believer now. Shouldn't I go back to my first spouse?" Paul says, "Stay exactly where you are. You're married. You're just as married as anyone who is in their first marriage so stay where you are."

### **Marriage Is a Concession, Not a Command**

While the Bible allows for remarriage in the circumstances of death or the remarriage of a spouse, marriage is never commanded. In all circumstances marriage is always a concession for sexual immorality.

Did you know that? Singleness is the best but if you're going to give in to your lust and passions then Paul tells us that God says you should get married (1 Corinthians 7:2). If you can't contain your passions, get married. Don't burn with passion. It's a concession.

That's why Paul says, "Be careful. Don't put younger widows on the widow list because they're going to burn with passion. They're going to have sexual desire and it would be better for them to get married than burn with passion."

### **3. We Must Recognize the Bible's Teaching Regarding the Specific Context**

Now I'm going to talk to people in their specific contexts. What does the Bible say to each of us? If I stop this sermon right here you're going to feel pretty judged if you've suffered through a divorce. We need to help our brothers and sisters. In fact, we all need some help. The Bible specifically addresses several different people.

#### **The Unmarried**

Let's start with the single people who have not entered into a first marriage. First Corinthians 7:8 says it is better that you remain single. Why would Paul say that? Didn't God say in the beginning that it was not good for man to be alone? Why would Paul say, "You should remain single as I am"? The reason was simple—there's a chance that your spouse might divorce you and that's going to hurt really, really badly. That's going to cut deeper than most cuts in your life. As a single person, the last thing you need to worry about right now is divorce. You're not married to anybody. You can't get divorced when you're not married. But those of us who are married have to worry about divorce. Amanda has to wonder, "Will Tim remain faithful to me? Or will he follow the world's standards, go look for something 'better' and leave me hanging with three boys?" She has to worry about that because of the hardness of man's heart—because my heart is hard at times and I can do some stupid things.

So when should you marry? The Bible says it's not good for a man to have sexual relations with any woman. In other words, 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 is saying that it's not good for men and women to just sleep around. If you have the urge to have sexual relations, the only place to do so is in the confines of marriage. So in verse two Paul says, "...*each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.*" That's where you do the sexual activity.

Maybe you as a single person say, "I have hormones moving. I know I can't be celibate and I'm going to get married." Here's my advice to the young people: pick well because you only get one choice. You get one shot. Marriage isn't a big deal if you believe you can divorce anybody at any point. That means many people get into marriage very callously.

So then you might ask, "Tim, how in the world do I pick well when I'm 18 years old?" I picked incredibly well when I was 18 and I was a moron. If you have ever spent any time with Amanda you know that I married out of my league and then some. So how in the world did I have enough wisdom to do that?

I started by getting advice from my parents. This may sound outdated, but prearranged marriages aren't all bad because they involve the parents. I remember having a conversation with my parents about Amanda. I said, "What do you think of Amanda?"

They gushed a little bit about her and then they said, "But you know what, there are some things that we're concerned about. She's great, she's beautiful and she has a great personality. But she's a new believer and we want to see some fruit from that relationship with God. We have some concerns about how she does some things."

I could have gotten angry with them and ignored their advice. Or I could have overreacted and said, "You know what, you're right. Amanda isn't perfect," and broke off the relationship. We get this idea that the person we're dating is perfect because we're blinded. But our parents are the ones who are not in love and they also know you. They are able to see the bigger picture.

My parents could say, "Amanda's not as patient as we think she needs to be because you are a moron sometimes. She needs to learn a little more patience to deal with you. And we're going to tell her all about who you really are because you've been lying to her this whole time about who you are in this dating relationship." Because that's what you do when you date; you lie about who you are. Then you get married and the real you comes out. Parents need to say, "You need to know the truth about my kid," not in a defiling way but in a God-honoring way.

Moms and dads, we're more concerned about a silly wedding ceremony and reception than we are about preparing our children for marriage. We need to be preparing them from a young age. My sons need to be hearing what they should be looking for in a wife. Do you know who they should be looking for? I don't mean this as a joke in any way—the boys should be looking for their moms and the girls should be looking for their dads. Our children should be able to say, "My mom is an honoring mom. She loves and respects my dad. She sacrifices and takes his needs over her own." Girls need to see their dads sacrificing and loving their moms. This is what our children should be looking for in their spouses.

So how do you begin teaching them? Where do you start? Start by loving your spouse and your kids will learn to love their future spouses. In many ways, I married my mom. Now, my mom and my wife are incredibly different but what I mean is that my wife loves me as my mom loved my dad.

This is the legacy we need to be leaving. You might say, "This is hard stuff!" Yes, this is why Jesus said it's hard. The disciples said, "Who can believe this stuff? This is too hard." So stay single if you can.

## **The Model Marriage**

What does the model marriage look like? [First Corinthians 7:1-5](#) outlines it. It's not a perfect marriage; it's a model marriage. It is found in the marriage bed in the conjugal rights that the spouses have. You might be

thinking, "But marriage isn't all about sex." No it's not, but it's a picture. The picture of sexual intimacy in this passage is a man giving all of who he is—body, soul and spirit—to his wife and giving her full ownership of that. And it is the wife giving full ownership of her body, soul and spirit to the husband. This is most clearly seen through the sexual union. There is full transparency and ownership where the two become one. Husbands, you no longer own your body. Your wife does. Wives, you no longer own your body. Your husband does. So the model marriage is sacrifice. It is a willingness to be fully transparent in that way.

## **The Messed-Up Marriage**

Not all marriages are models so let's talk about the messed-up marriage. Some of you today find yourselves in a nightmare and are disheartened by my words. My heart truly breaks for your situation. I wish you could see how my heart is broken over broken marriages. But God does not call us to marital comfort. He calls us to marital Christ-likeness.

Some of you might ask, "Didn't God divorce Israel?" No. Israel remarried herself to another man and God says if you do that—if you pursue other gods—here's your certificate of divorce. Did God divorce His people? No, He sent His Son to die for them. So in a nightmare marriage—as hard as it is—you need to pursue Christ-likeness and listen to the words of Jesus. When you do that, your only goals in a nightmare marriage are to pursue reconciliation, pray and endure.

Now you might say, "But wait a minute, Tim. My husband's abusing me. He is totally wreaking havoc in my life." If that is the case then you have the concession to leave the house. And we as a church need to come around you and love on you. But it does not give you the right to tear apart what God has joined together. So as a believer in a nightmare marriage, you have to live out the Beatitude kind of life:

1. Poor in spirit – Recognize that, "My husband may be lousy but so am I."
2. Merciful – You might think, "My wife has wronged me and you want me to show mercy?" Yes. That's what Jesus says.
3. Pure in heart
4. Peacemaker
5. One who is blessed for being persecuted

Those Beatitudes don't apply only when things are good. They are characteristics that we should display even when we are being wronged—even in the context of marriage. You need to know that God is your biggest fan. When you fight for your marriage, you might have no one else standing with you but God stands with you in solidarity. He says, "I will give all that I can to the changing of that person's life." Give it time. Seek to reconcile your marriage.

## **The Spiritually-Mixed Marriage**

If you're married to an unbeliever, can you get a divorce? Nope. You need to stay. How do you know that you won't win your spouse to the Lord? That's in 1 Corinthians 7:12-14. You get to sanctify your spouse.

Paul says that if you're in a bad marriage, you are in the best possible place you can be for reconciliation to take place because your godliness will inevitably spill over to your spouse.

## The Remarried

This is the ball game. I've already come out and told you that unless you have pursued remarriage as a concession under point two, Jesus is calling you an adulterer. Those are powerful words, but that's what Scripture says. If you have remarried outside of those two clauses, the Bible says you've committed adultery. It's plain in the text.

There are a few things you need to understand about this before we close in prayer:

1. Your present marriage is a real marriage. Honor God with all your heart in this marriage. You might say, "But Tim, I have this past." That's fine. You're married to this new spouse. You are really married so be the best spouse you can be in your current context. There's no question about that.
2. I'm an adulterer too. As your pastor, I confess to you that I too am an adulterer. Not because of my marital status but because lust has gotten the best of me in my past. So if you feel beat up at least you can say, "I don't know about anybody else but I may be an adulterer and so is my pastor." So you're not alone.
3. All sins are forgivable. This includes the sins of divorce and remarriage. Take God's forgiveness, repent of your sins and give it over to God. He is faithful and just to forgive you. This is true for the sins of anger, stealing and adultery. We're all sinners in need of God's grace.

John 8:3-11 shows us how Jesus interacted with a woman caught in adultery. While men wanted to stone her because the law of Moses commanded this, Jesus told the woman, "Go and sin no more." Based on His example, we recognize as this church that we're all sinners in this place. God does not condemn but He commands for each of us to go and sin no more. Be assured that whatever your past may bring the grace of Almighty God is there to cover it and condemn no more. Therefore we as your church should not condemn either.

Those of you who are in this situation, repent. Seek forgiveness. If you are able, pursue reconciliation. Make your present marriage as God-honoring as possible, whether it's your first, second, fifth or one hundredth marriage. Make it the best it can be.

Let's pray.

Lord, I'm exhausted. I pray that in my exhaustion my words have been clear. You know that I love these people. They are my family. I don't just love the first-marriage people; I love all of them. They are good and righteous people Lord because—like me—they have been washed by Your blood. I drop my stones and I pray that we all would drop our stones. I pray that we would embrace Jesus because it is Jesus who cleanses us from our sins. Let us embrace that grace.

But Lord, let us not embrace that grace by coming up with schemes and ideas of how to turn a blind eye to our sin. That's why grace is so costly. It went to our greatest need and it took Jesus dying on the cross and forgiving us of all these sins. It wasn't about making things easier but about dealing with sin once and for all.

Lord, I pray that wherever we may be in our marriages, we would be humble and recognize that we all miss the mark. We all need you in our marriages and in our lives. Forgive us of our sins—not just this week's sin that we're dealing with right now but all of our sins. Let us be quick to confess our sins to one another and especially to you, Lord. You are the only One Who can forgive us and cleanse us of our unrighteousness. Let us stand with our heads held high knowing that we are saved by grace. Let us go on and serve You, love You and show the world what a true follower of Jesus Christ is all about: holiness, godliness and living out the commands of God no matter how hard they may be. Empower each of us this week—whether single, widowed, married, divorced or remarried—to live by Your Spirit so that we may abide in Your truth. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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