

Ephesians 5:22-33

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Date: 13 January 2019

Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0:00] Please join me in taking your copy of God's Word and turning to Ephesians chapter 5. This morning is going to be abnormal for us.

! If you're a guest this morning, I'm sorry. On the one hand, I really would love for you to be here with us for our normal verse-by-verse exposition, the general habit of our church. On the other, maybe it's good for you to see that as a church we take the Scripture seriously and what it teaches seriously, even when it comes to topics of Christian living. We, as a church, endeavor to walk in all things in the truth. Over the past, I don't want to admit how many years, the issue of marriage, divorce, and remarriage has come up in our verse-by-verse exposition, that as well, exposition, as we work through the Gospel of Mark, and then more recently through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. And each of those times, I have said to you, you'll recall if you were here, that this is not an easy matter to sort through. In fact, it has been a centuries-old debate on exactly what is the teaching of the Bible concerning particularly divorce and remarriage.

If you find yourself in a place this morning, believing that you have it already sorted out, let me just invite you into a place of humility. It's most likely that you have not yet read enough concerning these matters, that you've not really studied it fully, if you have a abounding confidence in the position that you may hold. I know that many of you don't really know exactly what to think, and this is where I found myself in some past years. Recently, comforted by all of the position papers that I managed to find and pull and read, that the shortest amount of time any church took in forming a position was a year, and many of them took much longer in careful study over the matter. No matter the position we take concerning divorce and remarriage, we have to extrapolate, we have to draw out some meaning, because the Bible is an ancient book. It wasn't written in our language, and it wasn't written to our cultural context. So there's some challenges sometimes fully grasping the meaning of a text, right? Ringing it out, and then having it harmonized with the rest of what the Bible has to say. And this has been my labor over the past months.

I've picked it up. I've gotten so exasperated that I've put it back down. I've picked it up again, because I knew that I had to. I have never in the past 10 years of being a pastor prayed for snow.

[3:26] I must admit that I did this week, and yet we find ourselves here. I have read and read and read. I have taken all of the pertinent texts and put them up on a large board so I could look at it all together and scribbled and erased and tore down and put back up again.

I've labored in writing. Students, you may connect with me on this and then highlighted whole pages and hit delete. Rewrote and deleted and rewrote again.

I have sitting on my computer now as a draft a 10-page paper and growing that I had intended to give to you this morning.

But as I personally have arrived at a position and looked to articulate that position, I set out first to say, I'm just going to write a paper that states the position.

And then on the Sunday that we talk about it, I'll try to do my best to articulate the opposing positions and work out the complexities of the text. But beloved, it is complex.

[4:40] It's not a single Sunday morning working out. And I don't think it'd be great for our church to spend weeks and weeks and weeks Sunday morning gatherings on this. So we're going to do it this morning.

We're going to take some time. But as I began to try to articulate the position well, it seems so often necessary to talk about other positions held.

And so the paper kept growing and growing and growing. And as I would reread it, I'd go, I can't just say that. That's a jump in logic. As people read this paper, I've got to explain that more.

So another paragraph and another paragraph and another paragraph would be added. So at this point, I've discarded it. I mean, it exists, but I don't intend to hand you the document that I've been writing thus far.

But decided instead to distribute to you, sort of as a rough draft of a position for our church, a document that I had nothing to do with, but yet I agree with it to this date.

[5:47] That's a position paper that was presented to and adopted at the Presbyterian Church of America 20th General Assembly in 1992. And it's a part of a much greater work.

There's some application chapters. There's some historical survey chapters as the PCA Church has a rich Reformed tradition.

And what I've done is I've just pulled out chapter 2. and made a ton of copies of it and stapled this hand sore to be able to put those copies in your hand this morning so that we can talk further about this.

So I have some guys, I think they're the same guys that took care of the offering for us. They've got some stacks. I'm going to ask them now just to go ahead and work on distributing copies of this particular paper for your further study.

We're going to reference it a little bit here in just a moment, but I want you to take this home. If you're a guest this morning, you don't have to. I don't feel like you're obligated to take a copy of this and study it. If you're a member, you certainly need to.

[6:53] If you're a guest, you're welcome to, if you'd like to put this in your hand. I think we have enough for everybody this morning. To be clear, presently, we believe in a plurality leadership.

Presently, we have one other elder, including myself. There's two of us, Doug Hitchcock. And I'm not presenting this as our position this morning because I have not given Doug Hitchcock enough time to...

He didn't even know I was doing this. Now he does. Hey, Doug. Him and I have done a lot of work on this topic. I think very generally we agree.

We've spent a bunch of time talking through various implications and applications. But I just want you to be aware that I'm springing this on him at this moment. So don't, if you're upset, grill him. Come to me. While you're getting this, I want to express to you just some pastoral concern. The way we approach this topic matters deeply because marriage is an extremely important institution.

[8:06] We'll talk more about that from Ephesians chapter 5 momentarily. Extremely important institution. We don't want to minimize, in talking about this, the importance of marriage.

But at the same time, we live in a fallen world and people have been affected by divorce and remarriage, the challenges and the messiness of marriage.

And so we don't want to minimize our love and care and concern for people as well. And so there's a very careful tightrope to walk here in talking about these things that I hope you'll join me in in some coming weeks.

I want to read from a pastor named Sam Storms who wrote a position paper on this. I just felt like he summarized this pastoral challenge well.

So please hear my heart as we spend some time this morning around this topic this morning. He wrote, How do I stress the permanence of marriage without condemning, how do I feel judged and rejected and unfit for ministry and service in the church?

[9:44] But if I express compassion and love for divorced people and remind them how much God really does love them, others may think I'm glossing over their failures and that I'm contributing to the very devaluation of marriage that I earlier denounced.

How do I stress the permanence of marriage without condemning the divorced? And how do I love and affirm the divorced person without condoning sin and failure?

Our challenge is to mingle the call to obedience with the tears of compassion. To be both tender to those who have failed without compromising the high standards of Scripture.

Here then is my two-fold appeal. Number one, to the divorce I say that my emphasis on the importance of marriage and honoring one's vows and fighting to stay together does not mean I don't love you and care about you or that you aren't wanted or can't fit in or can never be active in

ministry.

Second, to the married I say that my emphasis on the dignity of the divorced person and their value to God and the forgiveness and restoration that is available to them through the cross does not mean that we can take a flippant, casual attitude toward marriage or that marriage isn't worth preserving or that we are adopting a loose view toward sin.

[11:17] End quote. So why have I labored so long in coming to a position concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage?

Why does it matter so much that we work together on getting this as right as people, this side of glory, can get it? First, marriage pictures, although so often imperfectly, the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's a shadow of a greater thing. It's meant to point us to the good that God has given to us in Jesus. Let's look at our text briefly. Again, this is an odd Sunday for us. Ephesians chapter 5 is going to serve this single point of why this matters so very, very much, and then I'll make some further comments.

Ephesians chapter 5, verse 22 and following. Beloved, this is God's word to us written for his glory and for our good.

[12:29] We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body and is himself its Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I'm saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. So we can see in this text that Paul says this profound mystery of the way that marriage is supposed to work points us to a greater, a grander thing.

[14:04] That Jesus Christ is the groom of the church, and he has saved her by giving of his very self for her.

He laid down his life for the sake of ours. That he would save us and that he would sanctify us. Giving of himself for our good in him.

This is what marriage is meant to be like, and it's what is meant to point to men sacrificially loving their wives.

For their wife's good, that she would be found in Christ. That she would be found holy in him. And wives lovingly submitting to that leadership in the home.

This was the design. Paul even cites for us here, Genesis chapter 2, when he says, Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

[15:06] This was the design from the beginning. A man and a woman in lifelong commitment to one another. Pressing each other in holiness. That's why this matters.

As sin enters into the world, just a few verses later in Genesis chapter 3, as sin corrupts everything, The church should be set apart.

The church should say something very clearly to the culture around us about what marriage is, how it's to function, and what it's meant to picture. So the way we pick up this topic is of importance, and why I've labored so long in it.

Because first, marriage pictures, although so often and perfectly, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Secondly, marriage is a good gift.

Many of us in this room have experienced the goodness of marriage. Being granted a spouse that loves us and presses us on, even in their failures, press us towards holiness in Christ.

[16:20] And divorce, invariably, is difficult for all parties involved. Invariably. This is without exception.

The rending of a union is a hurtful thing. It's a hard thing. We want to promote lifelong marriages for the good of people to the glory of God.

We don't want to promote divorce because it's a harmful thing. It's a damaging thing. Third, we have had to, and will continue to have to, counsel those within our church and without, outside the doors of our church, what the Bible teaches on matters concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage. It's a very present reality before us. We need to be clear-minded on these things. What does the Scripture teach concerning these matters?

Fourth, our culture is very confused about marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

[17:40] All three. We have a fairly anything-goes mentality as a culture at large. Having redefined marriage altogether, accepting divorce for any reason whatsoever, those who fall in love get married, those who fall out of love get divorced.

A large billboard on your way to Atlanta right now on 400 that says, undo, quote-unquote, I do. And it's tragic that such a thing would be the display for this particular law firm.

Many people these days go through multiple divorces and remarriages. marriages picked up as a flippant thing, a thing to not be taken seriously.

Vows are meaningless in our culture these days. Fifth, the church is confused about marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

The church at large is confused. We see equally high divorce rates amongst those who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ as those who don't.

[18:58] So there must be clarity. But not only in what we would call more conservative views, more biblical views on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, but there are many within orthodoxy opposing views.

This is a centuries-old question and debate. I want to maybe even caution you to not go down the wormhole too deep on this debate.

This is why I've charted and graphed and drawn out. I would annoy you to death sharing with you all of the things that I've done to try to wrap my mind around all the varying views and positions. Even within the prominent views, there are nuances of them that are hard to represent. It's difficult to say, let me tell you what this view says because I can speak to it in generalities, but the particulars can differ all the same.

And so there are three positions worth considering broadly, and I want to point your attention to the second page of this document that was handed out.

[20:14] Which outlines those for you? So it would be marked as page 203.

About two thirds down the page, it says number one, no divorce, no remarriage. That's where I'm drawing your attention to. Those are three positions worth considering. There's another, although there's variances in it enough that some might call it more, but I'll call it a fourth view, which is basically an anything-goes type of view, which we won't even consider.

The Bible does have things to say about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. We can't just define it for ourselves and treat it however we would like. So call that the fourth view and look with me for just a bit at three positions worth considering.

So the first one is the no divorce, no remarriage view. This is very commonly called the permanence view. It's the only view that has an agreed upon name. So if you hear permanence, this is what's being talked about.

Again, there are nuances within it, but permanence folks would say that there is no reason for, biblically allowable reason for divorce and no biblically allowable reason for remarriage if somebody has been sinfully divorced.

[21:42] And there are many orthodox people that hold this view. Some examples in our day are Votie Bauckham and John Piper. There's not a lot of writing, but I have some writing on this particular view.

It's a lesser held view in what we would consider orthodox Christian belief. I think there are some people in our fellowship that hold this view and there are some great arguments to be made for it. Second, and this paper develops some of those arguments. The second view, and this is the view put forth in this paper and that I would put forth to you this morning, which we'll talk about generally,

strictly limited grounds for divorce and for remarriage.

I have deemed this, me by myself, nobody else has, but by myself I call this the less permissive view. So permissive would say that there are some allowable times and purposes, reasons, but it's not a broad sense.

It's a lesser sense of permissive. See the first couple sentences there. a general consensus among reformed believers is the view that the Bible neither condones nor commands divorce, but rather permits and regulates divorce due to sin.

[23:13] So it's not the high ideal, it's not the thing that we're counseling toward ever, it's not the thing we want to see happen, so the scripture doesn't command it, the scripture does not condone it, but rather permits and regulates it.

However, a person can divorce only for adultery and separation of an unbelieving spouse. There's some specific circumstances in which someone can be divorced and the question of remarriage arises later as a result.

Prominent people who interestingly all their names start with a J, John MacArthur, J Adams, the late John Murray, Jim Neuheiser, these are all people you may be familiar with that hold to this view.

Once again, with variance and nuance in their particular holding of it, the place where my brain came to a constant screeching halt, got all knotted up, was particularly around the conversation of remarriage and there's not a massive amount of consensus concerning that matter.

The last one is a broader grounds for divorce and remarriage. I've deemed this the more permissive. It's not outside that realm of anything goes kind of a mentality, but they would suggest that those two reasons given, adultery and separation of an unbelieving spouse, should be interpreted with more latitude.

[24:53] So they're more quick to include things like abuse in that category or not providing for and meeting the marital agreement.

They would tend to work into some of that understanding. the labor in this is that we don't want to condone that which is sin.

We don't want to give permission for sin. We also do not want to forbid that which is not sin. There's an error on both sides here.

There's always a fine line to walk between licentiousness and legalism. We don't want to find ourselves in either place.

So the position that's put forth in this paper, the position that I'm putting before you today, I believe is the most exegetically defensible, theologically sustainable, and pastorally sensible.

[26:00] For us as a church, it's going to be important that we say, this far, but no further. We have to say, what can we be confident the Scripture does in fact teach?

I do think that allows for some narrower views. I don't mean narrow-minded, I mean just more restrictive views within that view. But we're going to have to consider what will our church call sin and what will we not?

This is a challenging thing to do in this matter. Consider particularly the faithful churches that hold varied views and that people may come to us from those places and we will be asking them to recognize something as sin that they did not previously recognize as sin and may not be.

Some of my insanity coming out, are you starting to go, gosh, I have been losing my mind over all of this. So here's the position summary.

I know we're not opening the text. This is a weird Sunday for us. Please know that if you're a guest. The position put forth in this paper, this is my summary of that position and it's what I want you to pick up and I want you to wrestle with.

[27:23] Number one, marriage is the lifelong uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment. This is from our statement of faith. Marriage is. This is what it was intended to be.

This is the point. We do premarital counseling in this way. The vows that we do when I officiate a wedding ceremony are permanence vows.

We don't say do you, unless of course if. We don't include that. This is the point. This is the goal. This is what we're striving for. Lifelong uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment.

That's number one. Number two, a believer should not marry an unbeliever. This comes into play later as we talk about remarriage. Believers should not marry an unbeliever. They should not be unequally yoked. Third, a believer should remain married to an unbeliever if the unbeliever is willing to remain married.

[28:31] Somebody converted to faith in Christ should not divorce their unbelieving spouse if the spouse is willing to remain in the marriage. Fourth, divorce always stems from sin, but in some cases is not sinful for one of the parties of the divorce.

Divorce always stems from sin, but in some cases is not sinful. The Bible never commands divorce. It doesn't condone it, but it does not condemn divorce in two cases.

when a spouse is sexually unfaithful. Secondly, when an unbelieving spouse abandons a believing spouse.

And there are particulars and there are intricacies even in those two exceptions. Fifth, because death breaks the marriage bond, remarriage is allowed for the surviving spouse.

And sixth, and you're going to hate this one because it's the broadest one I'm going to give you this morning. The paper speaks more to this. In some cases, remarriage is allowed for divorced people with surviving ex-spouses.

[30:00] In some cases, remarriage is allowed for divorced people with surviving ex-spouses. I want you to read carefully through that section.

It's the very end of this paper. And give it prayerful thought and consideration. So, I know that's probably really unsatisfying for you. Know that everything I'm saying is accompanied by a 28-page document that I want you to read and dig into and give lots of thought.

Prayerfully consider it. Roll around. Have lots of conversations about this. I'm available most of the time to talk about it. My only rule is not today. I don't want to talk about divorce and remarriage today.

So, I promise I will shut you down if you come up to me after the service and want to talk about it. But other times, after today, I'm here with you and I want to walk through it and I want to pursue the truth together.

And so, let me just say some things to you about how we should continue in this process and then we're going to talk about the gospel again a little bit and then we're going to sing some great songs together and press on with our day.

[31:12] So, as we, it's been my labor, I'm inviting you into that now as well. Number one, let's be congregational. We are a congregational church.

That means that people who are members of this fellowship are responsible for the doctrine of this church. That means you play a part in that. And the elders of your church should and we want to give you leadership in that.

We want to get out ahead of you and do hard work and present things and teach you what the scripture says, but you are responsible for what our church decides, where we decide to stand on this particular issue.

And you should not do that when you show up to a meeting and suddenly you have questions and suddenly you have an opinion and a thought. Do the work.

Get in there and work it through if you want a voice and you want to speak and be part of the process. Be congregational. That doesn't just mean show up to a meeting and vote.

[32:10] That means pick up the challenge. Take up the work of working it through. I have got endless resources I could give you. There are many of them cited in this particular paper as well.

You may need to pick up a read and work it through and read it. So be congregational in the broad sense all the time as we're working this out together.

together. Secondly, let's give the Bible the final say. And what I mean by that is try to set aside your prejudices as you come to the text, which we all have around so many issues.

But almost all of us have been affected by divorce in some way in our life. We have emotion that we bring to the text. We want to see a certain outcome.

We would prefer it to say a particular thing to justify a particular action that's happened in the past or to condemn a particular action that's happened in the past.

[33:15] So prayerfully labor to set aside those things. Come to the text honestly. What does the scripture teach on this? Be prepared that it is not abundantly clear.

the most pertinent texts are on the back of your bulletin. You may or may not have noticed that. I think it's helpful to see them next to each other.

To not have to flip, flip, flip, flip, or scroll, scroll. I think it's helpful to actually be able to look at them together, compare. These are all from the ESV translations.

So I hope that will be a help to you in being able to look at them in this way. But be cautioned. Be sure to place your study of this particular topic in the larger context of God's redemptive story.

You have a printed copy of that, I hope. If you don't, I'll get you one. I didn't need to put that on the back of your bulletin, I hope. Try to put this in the larger context of God's redemptive story.

[34:26] Third, let's pursue the truth in love. Let's pursue the truth in love. Let's work together on this.

Please know that my intent is not for our church to hold my view. I don't care if I am shown right. I care that God's shown glorious, that He's given instructions to His people, and that we would follow those instructions for our good and His fame, His acclaim in the world.

So let's work together on that. I am glad to be challenged, but do so in love. Do so in care and concern. We want to come together and do this together.

Land our finger on the position our church will hold on this. The German theologian, this has been accredited to a lot of people, but it was the German theologian, Rupertus Melvinius, probably why people try to accredit it to somebody else, said, in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity, and that was the word used for love.

In all things charity. So let's pursue the truth in love. Fourth, let's be humble. Let's be humble.

[35:44] God has a way, if we are not already humble, humble ourselves to humble us, and I will be an agent in that process if need be.

I'm not saying that I've studied this more, therefore I'm right. I'm saying I have studied it, and studied it, and studied it, therefore I'm humble. You will not approach me with an argument I have not already argued with myself.

So be careful in your approach. Be humble. Don't think you have the corner on the truth. I don't think I do. I'm doing my very best with a great deal of fear and trembling to work out what the scripture has to say on these matters.

Please approach it the same way. It will serve us all well to do that very thing. I'm not trying to be true. The scripture is true. God be proven true in these matters.

So let's be humble. Fifth, let's remember the gospel. And last, let's remember the gospel.

[36:57] We as a people who take the Bible very seriously, praise the Lord, the grace that he has worked in us that we take the Bible very seriously, we also tend to take its commands and find our worth in the keeping of them.

To say we are most obedient, therefore we are accepted by God. But we are not accepted by God because of our works.

We are accepted by God because of the completed work of Jesus Christ. We would be fools to think that we will always have our doctrine and our practice all lined up.

Be a student of church history and you will find that no generation has done this. They've all had their failings, they've all had their faults. And while we want to endeavor to do it right, we should, oh, let us be the first perfect generation that's gotten it all right, it's doubtful that we will.

We will have missed it at some point. So even as we are zealous to be obedient to every command of the Bible, let's not forget that the gospel of Jesus Christ says to us that we're not accepted because we get it all right.

[38:13] We're accepted because Jesus got it all right. He threaded it perfectly. He is our righteousness. And he has the very motivation for us to want to get it right, to want to be obedient in all things, to strive to honor God with our very living.

And so let's not forget that. Let's remember the gospel as we work together. I'm going to close in reading to you as a way of reminder, Romans chapter 8 and verse 1 where Paul said, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

May we as a people pick up that promise as we endeavor to be obedient to every command of the Bible, particularly in the coming weeks as it pertains to marriage, divorce, and remarriage. church. Let's pray together to that end.