

Grace to Live – Sexual Wholeness and Marriage

Matthew 5:31-32 | Sunday, August 26, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

GRACE TO LIVE

SEXUAL WHOLENESS AND MARRIAGE

Matthew 5:31-32

Please listen as I read God's word.

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

I heard this week about a young man who went to a promotional event where a tire company was giving away a free set of tires to the first 100 people who would tattoo their tire brand on their body. That's right. Evidently it was an exceptional set of tires, priced at the value of 3 or 4 or 5 times a normal set of tires, and this individual did it.

I don't know about you, but I am unwilling to get a tattoo on my body for one set of tires. I'm not sure if I would do it for lifetime tires or not. I thought I could get one right here on my belly, go in, take my shirt off, show them my spare tire, and say, "I want my *free* tires." The problem with tattoos is they don't wash off. I think that's also the attraction of tattoos.

Jesus is telling us here in Matthew 5, verses 31 and 32: Marriage does not wash off. It's permanent. It's intended to be permanent, but it's not just that it's intended. The nature of our sexuality is such that when we are joined to another person in marriage physically, romantically, emotionally, spiritually, we become one with that person. That means that the separation of those two individuals who have become one is a *tearing*.

Jesus gives us some really difficult instruction. In fact, in an expanded explanation of these verses in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 19, Jesus takes this principle in the first 12 verses and unpacks it a little further. When the disciples hear it, they say to Jesus: "Who can do this? It's better not to get married!" They say, "Listen, Jesus, you are saying that marriage is permanent, and you are holding up a very difficult standard. We are like, 'Who should get married?'" You'd think Jesus would come in behind that and say, "No, no, no, no. Marriage is good," and that he would give some kind of affirmation there. Do you know what he says? He gives an explanation on sexual chastity.

Grace to Live – Sexual Wholeness and Marriage

Matthew 5:31-32 | Sunday, August 26, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

He says, “Well, not everyone can be a eunuch.” That’s the word that’s used. Then it’s amazing; he gives three causes of becoming a eunuch.

- One is: You’re born that way.
- The second is: Someone makes you that way.
- And the third is: You choose that to follow the Lord.

Then, stating what I think is rather obvious, Jesus says, “But not everyone can do that.” Just so direct! So honest about our sexuality and our drive for sex, and yet uncompromising about the sacredness of marriage.

Understand here that Jesus is talking to a society and a culture that practices easy divorce. The certificate of divorce that’s referenced in the passage allows a person to then go and remarry. That’s critical, because part of what’s so radical about what Jesus is saying is that women in Jesus’ day have no rights that we would find to be normal and right. So a woman’s choices upon being divorced (notice how I said that – she couldn’t divorce the man; only he could get the divorce) -- she either has to shamefully go back home, or she remarries. Or in desperate straits, she finds some way to make ends meet to get by, possibly prostitution.

So, when Jesus is saying, “This is your practice, but it shouldn’t be this way,” if literally followed, there are significant ramifications. He explains it in the Matthew 19 passage, the expanded version. They are like, “Wait a minute, Jesus. Moses tells us, the Old Testament tells us that there is the possibility.” Jesus said, “Listen, that’s not the way God intended it. That’s not God’s ultimate purpose or way. That was given because of the hardness of man’s heart. And God in his mercy makes accommodations to where we are. He loves us.”

Now, let me just say this. I’m aware that there are many individuals here who are divorced. You are in a second marriage or a third marriage – whatever the case might be. You may have children or parents – we’ve all been touched by divorce and some of us have been a part of personal divorce, a broken marriage. I don’t think the purpose of what Jesus is doing here is to:

- 1) Heap up condemnation on you. That’s not what this is about. I don’t think that’s what this message is going to be about.
- 2) I don’t think it’s right to say that if you’re in a second marriage that didn’t divorce because of sexual immorality that you are perpetually committing adultery if you’re in a second marriage.

I think that in the eyes of God, it was viewed as that initially. Then you are married, and now that marriage, this second marriage is sacred before God. So just in case you’re wondering, because this happens -- there are individuals who read a

Grace to Live – Sexual Wholeness and Marriage

Matthew 5:31-32 | Sunday, August 26, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

passage like this and say, “Okay, I was happier in my first marriage. I think I’m going to leave you and go back to him or her.” Moses called that an abomination. He said don’t do that, because that just looks like we’re swapping around and there’s nothing that’s sacred. Scripture tells us from the Old Testament law perspective, that’s not really what God intended.

I want to say this. I want to draw you into this moment and tell you that I’m aware that in this congregation we are from all over the world and all over the place culturally. It’s not uncommon at all to have some dear individuals who will come to Riverside who are together, not married, have children, and both have spouses somewhere else – maybe in another country. They didn’t have the resources to pay for the divorce. Maybe their spouse left them. And now they are coming and saying, “How do I navigate through this?”

I just want to proclaim this message: **God’s grace is sufficient for everything.** The message here is not: You meet this standard so you can be accepted by God. No. **Really, the message is: We didn’t meet God’s standard and he has paid the penalty of our sin, and he brings a transformation into our hearts.** Do you know what he wants for you? He wants for you -- here it is: marital happiness, if you married. Like bliss, like the joy my wife enjoys being married to me. Okay, that’s completely said in faith and hope.

Now, I want you to pray for grace for my wife, because she has to listen to me talk about marriage now. She knows my weaknesses and faults better than anyone, so pray that she has a lot of grace for this message. The point of the passage, friends, is not to give you a catalog for when you can and cannot get a divorce. The point is to help us understand sexuality and sex and marriage and how they go together.

Jesus has already told us that sexual sin is not just committing an external act. Adultery begins in the heart. Lust takes place in the heart. When Jesus comes in and redeems us, he redeems us sexually. He wants us to have this vision for moral purity, for sexual purity. That is from the inside out, and it only happens by his grace and by his Holy Spirit living in us and bringing renewal and renewing our minds.

Now he adds to that, to say: sexual sin is not just an external act. It’s not just an internal sin or motivation or lust, but it’s also divorce. It’s also a violation of the oneness of marriage. And then, in what really is very revealing, he says, “That’s really the only true grounds for divorce.”

Follow Jesus’ logic. Marriage is two becoming one, and it’s sacred. When you easily tear that apart, it’s sin. I know that that’s direct, but allow me to just keep the spirit of the passage, if you will. Sexual sin is so serious, it is grounds for divorce. He’s not saying if there’s sexual sin in your marriage you should run out and get a divorce. We would love to see God bring redemption to those couples.

Grace to Live – Sexual Wholeness and Marriage

Matthew 5:31-32 | Sunday, August 26, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

Now guys, the divorce rate is between 50 and 60%. This has affected so many lives. “You said, Brian, this wasn’t about feeling condemned, but I’m kind of feeling condemned right now.” What I want to say to you is, if you really hear the Sermon on the Mount for all it’s worth, it’s not just about divorce. Please, anyone who is divorced: Please forgive me. Please forgive Christians, because we have made divorce out to be like it’s the one horrible sin, right? We always get all worked up about sexual sin. No one gets worked up about greed and pride so much, right? Right?!

Yeah! We have this way of: “You’ll go blind if you do this.” We do! It’s nonsense! We never hear anyone say, “Hey, get out there and be greedy for money and you’ll go blind.” We have done a disservice to you, perhaps, by making you feel like you are wearing a scarlet letter. **I’m sorry, we’ve all sinned. We all need Jesus’ salvation. That’s the message of scripture, very clearly.**

I say that because it’s important for us to understand if we’re really reading the Sermon on the Mount correctly, that’s true in every one of these target areas that Jesus talks about. He talked about hate and love. We’re going to talk about integrity and loving our enemies. In all of those areas Jesus raises up a standard and we’ve failed to meet the standard of perfection. Or is it just me?

Okay, so stay with me. Let’s see this as just the foundation, I think, for everything Jesus teaches and the Bible teaches about sexuality and marriage. Two become one. Ancient text: **Genesis 2:24: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” This is the essence of marriage. Two become one. They become one physically. They become one emotionally. They become one spiritually.**

One of my elders said to me recently that he was in the workplace. A woman who knew he was a Christian came up and said, “Hey, would you lay hands on me and pray for me right now about blah, blah, blah?” And he said, “No, I’m not going to lay hands on you and pray for you about blah, blah, blah, because that’s going to create a spiritual connection that is not appropriate. I tell you what: I’ll pray for you.”

There is an awareness that there is an expression of intimacy that’s only appropriate for me to share with my wife in terms of a one on one with another woman. Emotionally we become one, which, praise the Lord, doesn’t mean we look like this, that we are exactly like each other.

Sometimes that happens. If you’re married long enough, you start to act the same. That’s kind of a frightening thought. I just pray my wife never looks like me. But it’s really more of a complementary oneness. We are very different. **Part of the unity we experience in marriage is dying to our own perspective enough to come to a oneness in our perspective.**

There is a temptation to say, “Well, my marriage partner is driven by emotion.” Or “My marriage partner is cold and rational and has no feelings. Or, “My husband or wife doesn’t process this right.” There are these ways where we dismiss

Grace to Live – Sexual Wholeness and Marriage

Matthew 5:31-32 | Sunday, August 26, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

their perspective, and that undermines and undercuts the oneness of marriage. We want to guard that essential unity as sacred.

I'm not going to go back over all of this, but just to remind you that we said that's part of what's going on with sex, with the sexual act of intercourse, making love to someone else. You are joined. You become physically one. So in marriage it's important to pursue one another physically and the intimate romantic relationship. That attraction is an important part of the oneness that we share in marriage. Amen! Right?

Matthew 19, just to show you; this is the expanded version of our text today: "And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?'" There was a religious debate going on in Jesus' day about the actual legitimate reasons someone could get a divorce. The same debate is happening today. "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?'" Genesis 2:24. Do you see how this verse keeps reemerging in all of these places? "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

Here is what I'd like to do in the few minutes that we have left. I would like to give you a very high level view of how to guard the oneness of your marriage. Because I believe that the passage is not just to serve us in terms of saying, "Okay, this is how and when divorce is allowed. There are other passages, 1 Corinthians 7 in particular, that speak directly to that subject. But I don't think that's the best use of the passage. What I want to do is for us to go to Ephesians 5 to talk for a minute about how two become one and how we live that out.

So would you turn in your Bible to Ephesians chapter 5? We are going to find in Ephesians 5 again an appeal to Genesis 2:24. That appeal – two become one – is the foundation for Paul's teaching on marriage. The actual teaching begins in verse 22, specifically on marriage, and it goes through the end of the chapter into verse 33. I want to give you an overview of a few points on two becoming one, but the first one starts before this text. Here's the first thing. Here's the best thing I know to tell you for your marriage:

I. Continually be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Now, I find when I have the privilege of counseling people as a pastor in marriage, the thing that would help them most in their marriage is just to act like Christians. I'm just praying you get saved and filled with the Holy Ghost and you act like a Christian with your mate.

Grace to Live – Sexual Wholeness and Marriage

Matthew 5:31-32 | Sunday, August 26, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

Because we do insane things in marriage! Not us, of course. But we talk to one another in ways that are like, “Are you kidding me? You did what?” It’s like we lose our minds. If you’re single, you should listen to this, because it happens. We do things that show profound disrespect. And then we come up with crazy religious support. In the history of the church we have really gotten this wrong at times. We have told women to stay in abusive situations. Listen, believing God for your marriage is one thing, but if you are in an abusive situation, you should not be in an abusive situation. Come see one of your pastors.

So, this section begins in verse 15 of chapter 5: “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” He is about to tell you how to live and make some really important applications. He says don’t be naïve! There are a lot of spiritual dangers. **There is a lot at stake. Be wise. Don’t be foolish.**

Verse 18: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.” You are at liberty as a Christian to enjoy a drink, a glass of wine, a beer, whatever it is that you drink, but you are not at liberty to get drunk. If I am your pastor, I charge you: It’s wonderful to be able to celebrate to the Lord the joy of God that he has blessed you with, but it is not wonderful for you to celebrate excess in this area. It’s not what God wants for us. And as Christians, sometimes we have to come alongside one another and say, “Hey, brother, this is an excess. Are you okay? Let’s talk.” I’m sorry, we’re talking about sex and marriage. **But be filled with the Holy Spirit. Continually be filled.** That’s the stress.

Now, what happens in verse 19 is a wonderful expression of what that looks like. Here’s what I want to tell you. The verses that immediately follow tell you how to encourage being filled with the Spirit, how to walk in the fullness and encourage being filled. It’s very simple. This is great advice for your marriage: “...addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart.” #1 would be worship.

1. Worship. It would be a Godward orientation, where you are seeking the presence of God in you and in your conversation and in your relationship. So we are constantly orienting our life toward him and worship toward him.
2. “Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” A grumbling, negative attitude and perspective is a marriage killer and a relational killer. It’s important for us to be real with one another and transparent, but we should be drinking in the goodness of God and ever grateful for how he is working in our lives.
3. “Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Grace to Live – Sexual Wholeness and Marriage

Matthew 5:31-32 | Sunday, August 26, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

This little phrase of giving preference to other people...just look at these three things and how they go together. I always want to be aware that God is here. My orientation is toward him. I want to live a life of worship and verbally express that. I want to have a heart of gratitude. I want to be grateful in *everything*. And then around other people, this is huge: **Prefer them. Submit to them. Put them first.**

What that tells you is the moment you just get locked down: “My way or no way. You are not going to do that. I’m not going to have it,” the Holy Spirit begins to flee. Yeah, there are times when we have to take a stand. You hopefully can deal with the nuance of this. Be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Number two is introduced here and this is what you need to do in your marriage.

II. Constantly say, “I prefer you.”

“I prefer you.” “I prefer you.” “You are first, not me. You.” Right? That is the key to marriage practice. In the verses that follow he begins to break that down. In fact, he’ll tell you what that looks like in marriage, then he’ll tell you what it looks like in the parent/child relationship, and then in the marketplace. That’s where he goes with chapter 5.

So let’s look at how he tells us to prefer one another in marriage. He says:

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.” (Genesis 2:24) This mystery is profound, and I am 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.

He begins to unpack here how preferring one another looks in marriage. He says, “Husbands, you are to love your wives the way Jesus loves the church. You are to give yourself sacrificially. You are to love your wife the way you love and care

Grace to Live – Sexual Wholeness and Marriage

Matthew 5:31-32 | Sunday, August 26, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

for your own body. There is this massive, huge sacrifice. Nothing is too much. Then there is this small detail, like hygiene and beyond.

It's about you saying, "I prefer her. I prefer her over video games. I prefer her over golf. I prefer her over the NFL season that's about to start. I prefer her over _____" and you fill in the blank. "I prefer her over my career success." The career has to serve *us*, because I am no longer me, I am us. We are united, and I'm going to fight to protect that unity. It's sacred. It's one. Two become one. I am no longer just me.

Just close your ears for a second, dear. I am so sorry I've not lived this better, but this is the truth of God. Enough of this nonsense: "I gave up my video game for you last night!" "I wanted to go out with the girls." She should say that, not him -- just to be clear where I'm going here. Yes, you did give up going out with the girls, men.

My wife and I are getting into this empty nest thing. We kind of like it. Kids are work, if you haven't figured that out. We love our kids. Oh no, they're streaming right now and listening. We adore our kids! They are such a gift to us! So, I'm sitting down with my wife on the couch and I say, "Sweetheart, you know, I feel like I'm orienting my entire life around you. You wanted this. I didn't want it, and now we have it. You wanted to do this and I didn't really want it, and now we're doing it." Basically, the gist of the conversation was: "Look at how good you have it!"

We were in a playful mood. It's half true, but mostly just joking. Her response to me was, "You know, it's about time. I've been doing this for decades and I think you could stand to orient your life around me just a little bit more!" So we were playfully having this conversation. There were times when it wasn't playful. There were times when it was downright ugly. **The reality is: Two becoming one is beautiful and amazing, but it requires two to die. It requires death on a daily basis.**

It's like the guy who was asked, "You've been married 50 years? Have you ever considered divorce?" He goes, "No, murder many times, but never divorce." Just recently I heard a report of a couple married for decades. They were asked, "How have you stayed together?" She said, "Well, we never got a divorce!" I was hoping for a little bit more, right?

So, there is this point where you are resolved: **No, you and me. We are together. Two become one. I need God's grace. I need help, Lord.** And that's the next point.

III. Apply the gospel in liberal doses to one another.

Here's what the Bible says. Part of the reason the divorce rate is off the charts and that we struggle is because we have an incorrect view of humanity. We are broken. We are wonderful. We are beautiful. But we are broken. We have

Grace to Live – Sexual Wholeness and Marriage

Matthew 5:31-32 | Sunday, August 26, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

sinned against God. And the only thing that heals us is Jesus. Only Jesus heals us. You've got to go into deep, intimate relationship knowing you are going to have to apply grace and you're going to need a lot of grace. That's what he unpacks here. I'd love to teach more on it, but I'm going to give you the last point. The last one is this:

IV. Spiritually fight.

Now, I don't mean with one another. Like, "All the curses in this book I call down on you!" No, that is not what we are after here, okay? "He said to spiritually fight. I'm gonna..." The book ends in chapter 6, verse 10. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might." Then he goes through this famous passage on spiritual armor. **I want to tell you, to be a husband, to be a wife, to be a mom, to be a dad, you must spiritually fight. You must fight for what's right. You must fight for God in your heart. You must live by grace and spiritually do battle over everyone you love. It is the reality from now until we are done. Until Jesus comes back, do not quit spiritually fighting.**

I don't have a tattoo. I will never get a tattoo, because according to 1 Corinthians 7, my body belongs to someone else. She sits on this front row and she does not want me to get a tattoo. It would take a lot more than free tires. So this is just theory, but I'm thinking that there is this appeal for some people to say it's permanent and it allows me to make a statement that I couldn't otherwise make. It's just a theory. If you have a tattoo, please don't tell me your theory after the service. I'm not building a theology of tattoos. It's just to illustrate something.

You were made for permanence in marriage, if you are married. There is a need. There is a longing. It's just built into your created being. And the genders, male and female, are a unique expression of the image of God. So if you are single, God is going to grace you and meet you and do a glorious thing. Many of the great leaders in scripture were single, including our Lord, including the Apostle Paul, authors of most of the substance of the New Testament.

In marriage there is something beautiful, but its richness and depth was lost because of sin, and it's restored in Jesus Christ. It's a process where we apply the gospel, the death of Jesus. "No, sweetheart, you are covered. I don't want to walk in the door and remind you of every failure in your life and just beat you down. I want to tell you: Jesus has covered your sin. You are changing. You are looking more like Jesus. You are more beautiful every single day." **A husband and a wife have an invitation into this intimate place where they display – here it is – the oneness that we share with Jesus Christ. That's glorious. That's sexual redemption.** Amen? Let's bow our heads.