

Marriage, God's Grand Design

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Bible Text: Luke 16:18; Mark 10:1-12
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We're going to go to Luke and then we're going to go somewhere else. Luke chapter 16 and as we look at that for just a quick moment, we're going to Mark 10 as we talk about "Marriage, God's Grand Design." In Luke's account of the teachings of the Lord, he comes to just one what we've designated as one verse where he quotes the Lord but we'll turn over to Mark and then even to Matthew eventually and look at a greater discourse of our Lord or a more expanded discourse of our Lord as recorded by those men. Have you ever wondered why there are four Gospels? It's because men were recording what they saw and heard the Lord do and God in his sovereignty used different men to record different things and we get a whole and balanced teaching on our Lord that way.

Luke 16, verse 18, the Lord says,

18 Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.

Now, go to Mark chapter 10. Would you do that? Mark chapter 10, verses 1 through 12. Mark 10, beginning in verse 1,

1 Getting up, He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them. 2 Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. 3 And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" 4 They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." 5 But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. 6 But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. 7 For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, 8 and the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." 10 In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. 11 And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against

her; 12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

In a tribe in Africa, there is a most fascinating marital custom: on the day that you are married, the women of the tribe give you a garment, a dress, and the law of that tribe is that as long as the dress holds together, you have to stay married to that man but once the dress begins to fall apart, well, then that's symbolic and now you can leave your husband. It seems that you and I live in a culture today where the fabric of marriage is far weaker than that. What bizarre and perverse things are being taught today under the guise of marriage. By the way, there can never be the marriage of one man to another man or one woman to another woman. It's impossible. That's not marriage. It may be 1,001 things, the government may praise it and applaud it and the civil magistrates may perform that kind of a ceremony but God ordained them male and female and that's the only marriage that there is. No other can exist, period. It's just that you and I live in a culture that is post-Christian. This country was founded on the premise that the Judeo-Christian tradition would be the moral foundation stone for our culture, for our institutions, for a sane and behaving society. Now we've moved away from that, what some philosophers call sociological law. Instead of law based on the absolutes of the Old and New Testaments, now we come to sociological law where just whatever the culture or society begins to feel or think is good or right, well, they'll make laws on that. So you and I are now in the minority, the strong minority. However, I believe there is going to be a pushback in our country. I believe that a lot of people do not believe what Hollywood believes, what the president believes, and what a lot of legislators believe. I believe they still believe in God's definition of marriage and sexual morality, they've just been intimidated into quietness and silence. So I believe and I hope there's going to be something of a conservative pushback. I wish it would come as a result of a spiritual revival and renewal but if not, I hope it comes as something of a cultural renewal. I have hope there.

Anyway, here we have in this text that Jesus is in this third phase of his ministry. He's had the great Galilean ministry where he mostly taught and trained the masses and he performed so many miracles among them. He spent a season of time away from the masses in what you might call his retirement ministry where he intentionally discipled and trained his 12 disciples. This part, though, is sometimes called his Perean ministry. He's heading to Jerusalem for a time now; he's back in the public eye. He's still emphasizing the personal discipleship of his 12 disciples but he's also teaching the masses at large. Now, in this setting, these men come up to him in verse 2 as we see, challenging Jesus with what they believe is going to be a self-incriminating question. They believe they've got him. They believe there is no way he can win on this question: can a man divorce his wife and marry another?

Look at verses 3 and 4 if you will, "And He answered and said to them, 'What did Moses command you?' They said, 'Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.'" Now, that's taken from Deuteronomy 24 where the men of Israel had become hardened and brazen. As a matter fact, when Jesus said, "Moses allowed this because of the hardness of the hearts of the men of Israel," that word "hardness" is the

word we get "sclerosis" from. They had sclerosis of the heart and what they were doing, they were so brutally mistreating their wives by just casting them out and sending them away for any reason and then the wives had the stigma of wearing the adultery label and that was terribly unfair. So in the setting of such wickedness, Moses improvised and gave them an allowance so that the ladies would not have to carry that public shame when the men were really the ones who were dissolving the marriage. So the men would dissolve the marriage, put all the blame on the ladies, she'd be called a public adulterer and Moses said, "That's not going to work. If you're going to be this brazen, this hardhearted and this wicked, we're at least going to protect the innocent here. You're going to give that lady a certificate of divorce so that she'll have in writing that she didn't initiate this, you initiated it." Alright? So Jesus said, "That was a an accommodation for a fallen and wicked setting. It was not God's ideal or God's plan to start with."

You do understand we live in a fallen world and this is going to throw some of you off because it used to throw me off, and there may be a better way to say it but in a fallen world, we often have to choose the lesser of two evils. You say, "Well, wait a minute, we never choose evil." Listen, every day you wake up in an evil world you're faced by evil and you carry an evil heart everywhere you go. There is stuff we have to deal with until we get in a glorified, perfect environment, amen? And so every time you go to the voting booth, you vote for the lesser of two evils, trust me, but you still ought to go and vote, amen? That's just the reality of some of what we deal with. Now, we're not going to redefine, we're not going to say that's God's ideal but sometimes we have to deal with where we are. Well, that's where Moses was. Such a corrupt and backslidden condition and he gave that concession mainly to protect the wives.

Now, to two schools of thought came out of the Jewish condition in this day. The school of Hillel, which was a Jewish rabbi, taught that a man could divorce his wife for any reason, he just had to do the paperwork. She could burn the bagels, "Alright, you're out." Paperwork, divorce her. Literally, men had that kind of authority. Then there was the school of Shammai which said that, "No, there is an allowance, a concession for divorce but only on sexual immorality." So these Jews tried to catch Jesus, going to see which camp he falls in so at least the other camp would be opposed to him. But Jesus takes a higher road. Jesus points out that Moses didn't authorize or institute a foundation of divorce, he just acknowledged it and allowed it because of this sclerosis, this hardness of heart, this vile mistreatment of the wives of Israel in this day.

Now look at verses 6 through 9, if you will. When Jesus begins in verse 6 with that conjunction, he says, "I'm not saying that God is agreeing with Moses, it's what Moses did at a certain time to accommodate a certain situation." "But," verse 5, "Jesus said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But,'" again, "'from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.'" So in reality, Jesus sides with neither crowd but he surpasses both of them and points to God's original ideal, God's great design of marriage, one man with one woman for one lifetime. Now, Mark leaves off here what Matthew puts in and that is the exception clause, if you will, of sexual immorality and we'll look at that in just a few moments. But in verses 10 through 12 of our text, the disciples come in and because the culture of the day was so full of

divorce, they said, "Well, how is this going to work out?" And Jesus in verse 11 says to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

Now, why don't we go ahead and look at Matthew real quick, Matthew 19, if you will. Matthew 19, verses 8 and 9. This same narrative but Matthew adds an additional statement that our Lord says. Matthew 19:8-9, "He said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.'" The word "immorality" is "porneia." It's a broad word; it can involve lots of sexual immoralities. Jesus is not saying, "You have the right automatically to divorce your spouse if they are immoral and violate the marriage covenant." He's just saying, "God does allow a concession sometimes in this case."

So we see here that in a fallen world, our Lord, Moses, shows us that sometimes you have to deal with things as they come and I'll say to you as an elder here, now in this church for 34 years: there are some times that we face a marriage that's in trouble and it's very difficult to discern who's telling everything just right and who's putting twists on things and who's not and it's just difficult. Sometimes we can't come to a real firm conclusion but just because it's difficult, we're not going to throw out the sanctity of marriage at Grace Life Church. Now, while we could and there certainly is no room for boasting here but while we could say compared to other churches of our size that divorce is quite rare, but that's like the folks at the cancer ward comparing themselves with the people down at the funeral home. Folks in the funeral home are dead so they felt pretty good so there's nothing to boast about and we have our struggles like everyone else does but I do appreciate that you have been a congregation that through the years has said, "Let's approach these things with compassion, with loving kindness, but we are not throwing out the biblical treatise on marriage."

I. That's something of the introduction of how this text narrative unfolds. Let's talk about the sanctity of marriage. Now, we use the word "sanctity" because sanctification means something that God has specially done and specially designed for his holy use and for his holy purposes. Marriage is not the invention of man, marriage is God's idea. He thought it up, he defines it, period. We do not have the right to tamper with it. I'm telling you, when a people begin to distort and pervert God's standard and God's teaching on these issues, the fabric of that culture will fall apart. Sanctity of marriage. It's a creation of God. Subpoint A: it is a creation of God. When Jesus was being, or rather the Pharisees were trying to entrap Jesus with this question, trying to get him to decide with one of the schools of thought to put some people against him, he went back to God's original intent. He says, "From the beginning of creation, God made them male and female." Now let me just make a statement here: I know there are troubled souls out there, as a matter of fact, I think when I preach more directly on this issue of sodomy and homosexuality, I think one of the things I'm going to say is that I want you to know folks, you're not alone. We're all depraved sinners. We all have unnatural lust. We all are full of self-gratifying desires.

But we ought to be repenters of those desires and those lusts that violate the laws of God. You are not alone. You're not unique. We all have fallen, sinful hearts. I abhor this notion that there is a certain segment of culture and they're just special and they're unique. No they're not! We're all sinners. We're all fallen. We're all tempted. We're all corrupt. We all have lust and we need the standard of the community and the standard of laws and the standard of the church and the standard of parents to help us hold us in line or if we give ourselves to our wanton, filthy hearts, we'll corrupt and corrode and destroy everything we have. You're not alone. You're not special. We all have depraved hearts. Amen?

God made them male and female. Where did we come up with this idea that you can be a man trapped in a woman's body? And you can be a woman trapped? It's almost like the moment you feel that could be the case, the greatest crime on earth is to even lovingly challenge that person to say, "You ought to think about that a little bit first. Before you go and get surgery, before you go living a perverse life, you need to look at that a little bit." You mean to tell me that none of these people are confused? We have in this church a number of people who have been on both sides of the aisle sexually and will tell you that they were confused in their sins. I thank God they've come to repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and have landed in the right place and they are welcomed and loved here, amen? If there is repentance, then you can be restored. But I'm telling you folks, a lot of folks are confused and the last thing they need is their journeying off into unnatural affections is for the world, the government and now the church is to begin to stand up and say, "Oh, we understand. God made you that way." No, that's not what God did. God made men men and he made women women and then he put them together in marriage and that's what marriage is. God created it. God designed it.

In Genesis 2, God made woman out of a man, Genesis 2:22, so she came out of man and what God ordained was now we have male and we have female and now they come back together in a marriage union, in a sexual union and then at that point, a creation of God occurs again, that she is re-created, he is re-created into one flesh again. The Bible teaches that. That's why he says, "You shall leave your father and mother and cleave unto your wife." There is a pursuing love that develops in that and the union of husband and wife when they come together in marriage and consummate that marriage, the Bible teaches that is a spiritual and supernatural creation of God and it is as indissoluble in God's eyes and in the present creation order as a blood relationship is indissoluble between a parent and a child. So God says, "I made woman out of man. They separate but I bring them back together in marriage and in sexual consummation and they become one flesh again. I created them one way, I bring them together and I create something else." There is a sanctity to this. There is a holiness to what God does in marriage.

In Mark 10:9 of our text, notice how the Lord words this. He says, "What therefore God has joined together." Notice he didn't say, "Whom therefore God has joined together." He says, "What therefore God has joined together." What he means here, the sexual consummation of the marriage creates a new joining, a new thing in God's eyes. Then he says, "What God has joined together, let no man tear apart." Divorce is as much a travesty on the work of God as an abortion is a travesty on the work of God. To destroy a marriage is to destroy a work, a creation of God. That's why we see such strong

admonition in the Old Testament, Leviticus 20:10, the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death. That was under national Israel, we're not under that in our country today, we are not under a theocratic rule today but it shows God's standard concerning this. In the Ten Commandments, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife." Why? God is protecting marriage. In Malachi 2:14-16, "Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. For I hate divorce,' says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'and him who covers his garment with wrong,' says the LORD of hosts. 'So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.'" In other words, the prophet is saying, "This is a special creative act of God. You are not to deal with it in a treacherous and sinful manner." It's a creation of God.

Secondly, let's talk about that it's a covenant relationship. The marriage relationship is a covenant, it's not a contract. Contracts can be broken if there are certain circumstances but marriage was meant to be a covenant and the reason why we want to view it as a covenant is we think about God's covenant with us through his Son, Jesus Christ. Aren't you glad that can't be broken? And marriage is to reflect that. And I think Hosea and Gomer is a good guideline for us. Here we have in the book of Hosea, Hosea marries Gomer and she turns out to be a prostitute, as a matter of fact, I think she was already. Remember that Hosea represents God and Gomer represent rebellious Israel. This is Israel when Israel was spiritually in adultery so Gomer here is shown as an actual physical adulterer.

I'm going to turn there. As a matter fact, let's all turn there, Hosea, there in the Old Testament and we're looking at chapter 2, and we'll begin in verse 2. Notice just the spirit. That's all I want you to get here is the spirit that Hosea has about winning his sinful, adulterous wife back to himself. He says, "Contend with your mother, contend, For she is not my wife, and I am not her husband; And let her put away her harlotry from her face And her adultery from between her breasts." Now right here, he's showing some anger. He's upset; he's full of indignation about what she's done.

Verse 3, "Or I will strip her naked And expose her as on the day when she was born. I will also make her like a wilderness, Make her like desert land And slay her with thirst." Basically he's saying, "Boy, if I get my hands on her, I'm really going to let her have it." Just expressing the emotions that a typical spouse would have with a blatantly unfaithful partner.

Then we go down to verse 6, "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns, And I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths." Now things begin to change a little bit. He's going from his anger to seeing that she is in a stronghold of sin. He says, "I'm going to hedge up her way. I'm going to try to keep it so that she can't be exposed to the lust and the things that pull her away from her fidelity to our marriage relationship."

Look at verse 10, we see some anger jumping out again, "And then I will uncover her lewdness In the sight of her lovers, And no one will rescue her out of My hand." Now jump down to verse 14, if you will. Here's what's beautiful about this: notice the spirit now, "Therefore, I will allure her, Bring her into the wilderness And speak kindly to her." In the midst of her flagrant, vile and open immoralities, he says, "I'm going to take the attitude of I want to try to win her back. She doesn't deserve it. She hasn't earned it. I can have her stoned to death but I choose to do the other." Now what is, of course, this a picture of? This is a picture of how Christ moves us back to him; how we're spiritual adulterers; how we are rebels. Instead of shaming us and exposing our nakedness and our vile rottenness, he comes and in mercy and grace and love and he woos us back to himself.

Now, there's a pattern here for us in Christian marriage. Look, as Christians, we restore the original. Are you with me? Our goal is to show the world God's original intent and so as Christians, when there's difficulties in marriage and by the way, there are always difficulties in marriage. The Apostle Paul said he wished we'd all be single but he said not everybody has that gift. He said, but if you do come together in marriage, you've not sinned but and here's what Paul said, "But you will have trouble in this life." Some of you folks, you haven't been married very long and let me say this, listen to your pastor: grow up! Get over it! It's hard at times! That's a word from God. He said, "You will have trouble in this life." You'll get over it and what you've got to do, you've got to be able even when the other spouse is on the wrong track doing the wrong things, to have the heart that says, "I'm going to die to myself and try to woo them and allure them back into a relationship." You say, "Wait a minute, I don't know that I can do that." I don't expect you to do that, I expect Christ in you to do that. You're not regular folks. You're indwelt by the Spirit of God and you'll have a loving and strong small group and church family to stand with you and help you. Now, there are two sides to this coin biblically speaking, the church will be going after your spouse and calling them to repentance and holding them accountable with the threat of church discipline but you, for your heart, your heart should be like Hosea. That's the way that Christians should view this.

We have a number of marriages in this church that were thrown away, unfaithfulness, ruin and loss and God has restored them. You don't need to know who they are. Some of our best leaders have gone through that. By the way, if you've been through this nightmare, maybe you've made some bad mistakes but you've shown humility and you've shown repentance and you haven't tried to explain it away, by the way, I've about had all the blame shifting I can handle. If you get in a bad situation in your marriage, you be very careful about putting a spin on everything, thinking you're the innocent party. Be very careful about that. Let's be humble. Now, sometimes there are blatant wrongs and they have to be talked about. I understand that but all this stuff, we live in a world today where every tiny thing is an abuse issue. It's unbelievable the things we're seeing and I don't understand when your marriage gets in trouble why you run to everybody but your church while we are the last one sometimes to find out about it. I don't know a person's heart but the Bible says, "The wicked flee when no one is pursuing but the righteous are bold as a lion." If you're trying to get right and trying to do right, you ought to be willing

to come to church leadership and say, "Help me. Pray for me. Help me try to work through this." Are there not some brothers and sisters right here that we've spent hours and hours and hours together, amen? Helping each other. Encouraging. Helping you get on through it. If your heart is repentant and your heart is humble and you want to do what's right even though you've blown it in the past, you're welcome here and you're loved here. I want you to know that. But we are not going to say that the Christian's approach should be any less than the spirit of Hosea. Long-suffering in seeking if God might let me woo them back into this marriage.

Another thing that shows us the sanctity of Christian marriage is comparable to Christ's relationship, of course, with the church. Ephesians 5:28-32, "Husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it," here it is, "just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church." So how much a great and more lofty position could God put the institution of marriage than to say, "God in the beginning made man in his image, he took a woman out of man and then he said the separation is not my final work, I'm bringing you back together in the marriage union and in the sexual consummation, I make a new creation. You're now one flesh. I want you to know you are an expression of the covenant relationship that I, God, have with my people, Israel, and you are a picture, and expression to the world of how I have a covenant relationship through my Son, Jesus Christ, with the church, the bride of Christ."

Look, I think it is abhorrent, it is unthinkable for these liberal progressives to redefine the creative work of God. They have no right to do it and if our culture is going to go along with it, we want to stay kind spirited but we're going to draw a line in the sand and this church is going to say, "We are against it." I want you to know and since I've been pastoring here, it's one domino after another that the evangelical church has caved in on. One after the other. One after the other. And we've been going in the other direction against the grain of the culture. Folks, as long as I'm here, we're not giving on this issue. We're not giving on it. We are raising our boys to be men. We're raising our girls to be sweet, feminine little girls. And we're teaching them that God's plan is one man with one woman for one lifetime and we're going to love you and fight for you to that end for the glory of God. Listen to me: we live in a day where you better get your family in a solid church that believes something and not only just believes it but they are willing to try to practice the kind of accountability and discipline that shows they really believe it. How much higher could God put marriage than comparing it to the way he had a covenant with Israel and to the way he covenants with his bride, the church, through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ?

Grounds for divorce and remarriage? I can't spend all the time here I ought to spend but let's just look at this again for just a few moments and get an understanding in our hearts of where we are. We've worked on this many years ago. We've been functioning on these basic premises for many years but it's time to re-look at it again. Divorce and remarriage,

though it is allowable under some conditions, is not a part of God's original plan. God does give what I like to call a concession to sinful men in a sinful world. Now, it's wicked, it's carnal, it's wrong to seek a concession. I've seen that happen. I've seen people try to twist and spin things so that they can dot the "i's." "Okay, I've got the clause done now. I've checked off the box. I can get out of this marriage." That is wrong. Wrong. Wrong. Just because God allows a concession, it should be the last thing on our agenda. It should be the last thing in our hearts. We should never emphasize the exception, we should emphasize God's original intent. The true child of God is not like the Jews had become and not like the Pharisees and that's where legalism always gets to. Legalism starts out sounding like, "Oh, we're committed. We're strong. We're separate from the world. We've got conviction." But legalism always ends up being more fleshly than liberty and grace. It always ends up being more sin-indulging and more fleshly and that's what happened to these Pharisees. They got to the point where, "If we just do the paperwork, we can divorce anybody we want to." They just dotted the "i's," crossed of the "t's" and bent the laws the way they had perverted them and twisted them and did whatever their flesh desired to do.

We've already looked at Matthew 19:9 when the Lord said except in the cases of the Greek word "porneia," a sexual immorality that if you leave or divorce your wife, you commit adultery against her or vice versa but the Lord said even to Israel in Isaiah 50:1, "Thus says the LORD, 'Where is the certificate of divorce By which I have sent your mother away? Or to whom of My creditors did I sell you? Behold, you were sold for your iniquities, And for your transgressions your mother was sent away.'" They are sobering. God says, "I divorce Israel. I divorce Israel." So God shows us that there is a point, there is a time, when the wanton, willful adultery, in this case spiritual adultery, of course, is so severe, so open, so unrepented of that even God tells Israel, "I have sent her away with a written certificate of divorce."

So sexual immorality is a concession God will allow for divorce. In Jeremiah 3:8, "And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also." Now, the point is, Judah was typically viewed as the godly remnant but in this case he says, Israel and the godly remnant are now both wicked and in spiritual adultery. So once again, God expresses after...actually the scholars tell us, I think 700 years. 700 years of contending with Israel and he finally says, "I divorce you." Now, God never divorced the true remnant of Israel. Are you hearing me? This was national Israel and he says, "As far as being my people nationally, I've separated myself from you in divorce."

So the Scripture does allow, we're convinced, that in the cases of wanton and open and unrepentant sexual immorality, there can be a concession in God's eyes of divorce. But let me say to you again: I have seen it over and over and over again where that was the case and the so-called innocent spouse said, "There's no hope, I don't have a heart for them anymore," but yet God intervened and the marriage was saved. Don't shortcut God.

Secondly, not only sexual immorality but spiritual infidelity. Spiritual infidelity. 1 Corinthians 7:15-16. Now, there's a whole lot I know that needs to be said, a whole lot

needs to be explained. I'm just trying to tell you after many, many, many hours and even years of looking at this and praying over this, this is where we are as a church. "Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?" Now, the context is that some of these Corinthians were converted out of paganism, they came to Christ, they loved Christ, they joined Christ and their pagan spouse cannot stand their new devotion to Jesus Christ and their pagan spouse says, "Well, I tell you what, I'm not going to go to church with you and I'm not going to worship this Christ with you. If this is the way you're going to be, this marriage is over." What he says here, I believe in that place, will look at that unbelieving spouse and say, "I love you. I'll stay committed to you even though you're not a believer in Jesus but I cannot deny Jesus Christ." And if they leave on that basis, God allows divorce in those cases. But once again, I would caution you, the same text in the same context tells you to stay with your unbelieving spouse if at all possible seeking the Lord that he might convert them. But if they come to that obstinate, unreasonable spot where they demand you denounce loyalty to Christ, then you can't do that. You stay with Christ even if they dissolve the marriage over it.

I'm convinced that we live in an age and I think it's been like this in every generation, where you can go find a professing Christian congregation that you can join that will let you live in your sin so you can still wear the Christian banner yet you're still a denier of Christ. Are you with me? And we run into this over and over and over as elders in the church with people who say, "Well, I'll tell you, I'm just not going to go with you to Grace Life Church." Well look, show me biblically where we're wrong and we'll fix it so that your holy and righteous character won't be alienated when you come to church with us. They in effect, wear the flag of great righteousness. "To go to church, I have to go somewhere else because Grace Life isn't sound enough for me." You know that's not the case. They want to go to a place where they can live in and flaunt in and be comfortable in their sin and rebellion. I haven't kept records but I'm telling you, there is an uncanny consistency to the number of people who've left this church because one spouse says, "I'll not go to church there. I'll go to this other church," and it wasn't just a few months, sometimes a few years when they left their spouse. They wanted out of the marriage and they knew if they stayed here, there would be accountability and if not that, we'd find them down at the Mexican restaurant drinking long neck Budweiser's. I'm not saying that's the final sin and thing, I'm just telling you that you don't want to be in a church trying to do right when you really want to live in sin.

Are we just getting honest on this Sunday morning? Are we just getting honest about it? By the way, my flesh loves sin too but I'm glad I'm in a church where if I slip very far, my elders are going to call me in and call me to account for it. I need that and you need that and we need that. Don't be afraid of it. Thank God for it. Have you ever committed a sin and thought, "Oh dear God, if they find out down at Grace Life, I'm in trouble"? Amen? That's a good. If you belong to a church where you commit some kind of sin and somebody might find out about it and you're not worried about the church finding out about it, you're in the wrong church. You're in a joke. You're in Six Flags over Jesus,

you're not in the bride of Christ. You need to be where there is going to be some accountability.

Now, in defense of the church leadership and I don't mean just church elders but small group leaders, whoever may be involved in trying to hold people accountable and help us to save marriages, again, and I don't know any other way to say it this but we've been at this longer than almost anybody on earth. I know that because I get calls every week of people saying, "I can't find anybody who can give us guidance on these issues but you." And that's where I spend a lot of my time and energy these days, trying to encourage these pastors who are at least trying to do right. But we do run into cases and we don't know what to do with them. I'm just being honest. We don't know what to do. Are you okay with that? And we're just not going to go to knee-jerk conclusions when we're not really clear and so sometimes we just have to let it go on. Now, you understand that because sometimes if you've got six or eight kids running around the house and something happens and this one says this and that when says that, do you know what you say? I don't know what the truth is so I'll just beat all of them. No, that's what you feel like doing. You don't beat all of them. No, you say, "You know, we might just have to let that one go." Amen? And you know what I have found through the years? Here's what you ought to pray, "Lord, if there's something we need to see or something we need to know, you're going to have to show us. We don't run an FBI agency here. And when you show and make it clear that Scripture is being violated, we'll deal with the appropriate party, amen? But until, God, you make it clear, we've got to do what we know to do and that is just let it stand the way it stands."

So we believe the Scriptures teach that there is a concession allowable by God, not that God is encouraging it, not that God says...and certainly it's wicked to have a heart that's looking for it but under blatant, unrepentant, sexual immorality and a blatant refusal to serve Christ and they oppose you serving Christ, God says to let the unbelieving one leave.

Well, that's where we are. Marriage is God's grand design but it's being greatly marred in this sinful, fallen world. Now listen: what's our job as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ? Our job is to reclaim the standard and show the world, "No, here's what God can do even in hopeless marriages. Here's what God can do even when a partner has been vilely unfaithful. Here's what God can do." I've already said this but if you've been through something in your past and you're wondering are the elders, does the church, am I out of fellowship? Do they hold this against me? First of all, if we haven't said anything to you, we're not thinking anything about it. Secondly, if you've got a question, we want to deal with you with the utmost compassion. Utmost compassion and, by the way, utmost humility because you can't bring a marriage problem that we haven't seen. I mean, we've about seen it all and trust me, I don't know how to say this. I'm getting, we might ought to be off the Internet right now...you don't need to talk about everything that's going on in your marriage to everybody and if you do get counseling, you can talk in general and broad terms, can I get an amen right there? Be careful. We're all sinners. If I were to put on this screen some of the things that passed through your mind this morning, you'd never come back to Muscle Shoals again, much less this church. Be careful in a

difficult season when you're hurt and you're angry, splashing stuff out there that might ought to have been kept in utmost confidential settings and maybe shared to a degree in the most confidential counseling settings, alright? We're going to help each other. We're going to love each other. We're going to counsel each other through these things but be careful exposing everything that you might can expose and talking about everything that you think you ought to because a whole lot of times that's not really about healing something, it's about condemning someone else. Be careful. Don't cause a wound that can't ever be healed.

Let's stand together in prayer.