

Divorce and Remarriage

by David Pawson

David Pawson's sermon explores the biblical foundations of marriage and the complexities surrounding divorce and remarriage in today's society.

Duration: 1:44:00

Scripture: Matthew 5:32, Luke 16:18, Romans 7:2-3, 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, 1 Timothy 3:2

Topics: "Divorce Remarriage", "Christian Ethics"

Description

This sermon addresses the sensitive topic of divorce and remarriage from a biblical perspective. It emphasizes the importance of understanding and applying the teachings of Jesus on this matter, highlighting the principles of sin, forgiveness, repentance, and discipline. The sermon urges pastors and believers to prioritize seeking the truth of God's Word over following traditions or seeking precedents, emphasizing the need for repentance and obedience to God's instructions in difficult situations.

Transcript

Dear me, after preaching that long I should be able to do it better than I do it, but there we are. Tonight we're moving from the subject of Christian belief to the subject of Christian behaviour because that's just as important as Christian belief. I'm singling out one particular aspect of Christian behaviour because it's the one most widely neglected in the church today.

The accepted pattern for marriage in our society is consecutive polygamy. Simultaneous polygamy says you can have as many wives or husbands as you like at the same time, but consecutive polygamy is you can have as many wives or husbands as you like provided you have them one at a time. That is now happening widely.

The film actress Elizabeth Taylor died recently. I forget how many marriages she had but I can't count them. We follow our celebrities and celebrities' marriages are breaking up all over the place.

Divorce in my country has now reached record levels higher than any other country in Europe. That's so-called Christian England. But I've been growingly concerned and finally I had to write a book about it which I wrote very recently.

It's just been published. But I'm sorry to tell you there isn't one copy on the bookstore. They've all been snatched up and they're all gone.

So I'm sorry you'll have to get it another way. But that book took me forty years to write. I've been working on it for forty years.

Like many Christian families, this issue of divorce and remarriage has affected close relatives and dear friends. Therefore I know something of the pain and anguish that can be caused by this issue. I realise that some of you will find this evening's study quite difficult because you too have been involved.

Nevertheless, Jesus said quite a bit on the subject. Jesus said nothing about abortion, he said nothing about homosexuality, but all over the world Christians are outspoken on those two subjects and yet strangely quiet about divorce. Not just because it's happening outside the church, it is now almost as common inside the church as it used to be outside, and even among evangelical churches.

In this country, a pastor of an evangelical church pinned me against the wall, physically, and said, apologise to my congregation for saying what you did about their subject. I think he was on his third wife and a lot of his congregation were on their first or second or third. He was very, very angry because I quoted Jesus Christ and that was all.

Essentially, a Christian follows Christ and I will major on his teaching on this issue because he taught quite a lot, but later. I'm going to take you very quickly through the book and give you a taste of what I've written there because in an hour and a half we're certainly not going to be able to deal with all the aspects of this issue. And my chapter headings are all similar - what somebody said about this topic.

We begin with what God said, then we go on to what Moses said, then what the prophets said, then what the scribes said, and that will lay a foundation for what Jesus said, and then what Paul said. If we've time, we should look briefly at what the church said over the last two thousand years. But then finally, and I hope we'll get to this tonight, what we should say and when we should say it.

Because it's so common in the church, it's quite rare for preachers to deal with this subject. And alas, many pastors only deal with it when a personal crisis has arisen in the church, and then it's usually too late. I urge every pastor here to be teaching on this now before you face a personal crisis, when emotions are high and you're involved in a situation that's not easy to resolve.

So let me begin by asking, what has God said? Here I must begin by looking at what he said about marriage. It's interesting that the first scripture on godly behaviour occurs in the story of creation, and it's about marriage. And we begin with that.

What did God say about marriage? You'll find it in Genesis 2, right at the beginning of your Bible. After he'd created Eve for Adam, we then hear God's intention for marriage. I'll just single out three or four aspects of what God's intention for marriage would be.

The first thing, it was heterosexual. Marriage in God's sight is between male and female, between a man and a woman. We now have in England legalised homosexual marriage, and we have marriages between two men and two women which are totally legal in my country, but they're not legal in God's sight.

God's clear intention was that marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman, male and female. Secondly, for God, marriage was intended to be monogamous - one man and one woman. Polygamy of any sort, whether consecutive or simultaneous, is not God's will for marriage.

One man and one woman make a marriage. The third thing he clearly intends is that marriage is permanent until death. As it's put in Genesis 2, a man shall leave his parents and cleave to his wife.

That word cleave is now a bit old-fashioned, but it's a Hebrew word for glue, for sticking together. Or to put it quite bluntly, when you marry, you're stuck with her for life until death do you part. That's been embodied in the marriage service with the words, till death do us part.

Marriage is permanent, and young people here who are not married, I say to you, just think of that very carefully. Do not rush into something that's lifelong. You are tied together for the rest of your lives on earth, so be very careful who you choose.

Marriage is a covenant and not a contract. In God's sight, in human terms, it's a contract. If one breaks the terms of the contract, the other's free to make another contract with someone else.

We now have prenuptial contracts. That means you agree before you marry how to divide your money and house when you divorce. Fancy going into marriage having agreed what will happen if you divorce.

That's contract. But marriage is a covenant, and God makes covenants and he always sticks with a covenant. If he makes a promise, he keeps it.

Whenever God makes a covenant in the Bible, he seals it with two little words - I will. Those are the two words that seal a marriage. Not, I feel like it, or I think I will, but I will.

It's an act of the will. It's a promise which you are intended to keep, and in a marriage it's a vow before God, whether it's in the church or a registry office or a hotel, and now whether it's at the bottom of the sea in diving suits or up in the air in a kite, God is there. He witnesses it and he sees it as a covenant.

I will is the longest sentence in the English language. I'm waiting for you to get that, isn't it? It's a lifelong promise for the rest of your life. Now that's what God intended, and he intended it to be a unifying experience whereby two people become one.

That little word, one, is very important. It's not just that they have the same surname from then on. It's not just that their bodies join together at a very profound level.

God has joined every married couple together in their first marriage in a way that unites them which they can never forget. The only thing that can break that unity between them is death, and that does break the union. In God's sight, when a partner dies, the other partner is totally free to marry again.

I've conducted a number of second marriages, one within three months of the death of a partner, which some seemed upset by, but it was such a beautiful union, the second one, that in fact the first wife told her husband on her deathbed, as soon as I'm gone, marry her. She was the granddaughter of the great preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon, whom I'm sure some of you have heard of. Her name was Spurgeon, and I conducted the marriage only a month or two after he lost his first wife.

It's been a lovely, happy marriage. But it was death that ended the union, and therefore that unity he had with his first wife was broken, was ended. Marriage does not go on in the next life.

That's a very important point. I've had widows ask me, will I be reunited with my husband in heaven? I've had to say, not as your husband. Marriage is only until death.

It's an earthly relationship. It's a temporary relationship, permanent until death and then temporary. That's important to know.

They asked Jesus about a hypothetical case where a lady had had seven husbands because each husband had died. They asked him, whose wife will she be in heaven? Jesus said, that's an ignorant, ignorant question. Don't you know the scriptures? They don't marry and they're not married in heaven.

They will be as the angels. We shall be one big happy family in heaven. I won't be married to my wife, she won't be married to me.

We shall be brother and sister in heaven in a close relationship but no closer than with any other of God's people. Marriage is permanent until death and then it is ended. That should teach us something.

Don't pin all your hopes on marriage. That's a mistake that so many make. They think that if they can find the perfect partner they'll be happy forever afterwards.

You will never find a partner who is a hundred percent right for you. In fact, every marriage I've conducted I've told the couple, you are incompatible and you'd better face that now before you find out later. If you squeeze, the husband squeezes the toothpaste from the bottom of the tube, she will squeeze the toothpaste from the middle.

You are incompatible and you will very quickly find out that you've lived separate, different lives until now. Part of the fun of marriage is adjusting to that, coming to some compromise. The best compromise in the case I mentioned is to have two toothpaste tubes.

But that's what marriage is all about. That's adapting to the other person, coming to compromise, learning how to live together though you're different. It's not a case of, well, I wanted to marry who squeezed the toothpaste the same way I did.

No, we are incompatibles from the beginning, but it's how you deal with that that makes a good marriage. I think perhaps I have told you that my wife was asked in New Zealand, what's the secret of being happily married for fifty years? We were in a small meeting and like lightning she said, it's very simple, we're both in love with the same man. They all thought she meant Jesus.

They said, oh, what a lovely answer. When I got her outside I said, I was the only one in that room that knew who you meant. But then I said to her, behind every great man there's a very surprised woman, which is true.

Well now, let's move on. God not only spoke at creation, God spoke in the Ten Commandments. He wrote them with his finger.

Among those Ten Commandments, the most important things he told men about their behaviour was the seventh commandment, you shall not commit adultery. That's the second word of God about marriage, that betraying your marriage with a sexual relationship outside it is against the will of God. And he simply said, you don't do that.

It's a categorical imperative as we call it. It's an unconditional command. You don't do it.

And in this way he was upholding the sacredness of marriage because all the commandments are upholding the sacredness of things, or put it simply, all the commandments are about respect - respecting

God's name, respecting his day, respecting your parents, respecting life, respecting marriage, respecting property, respecting reputation. And if there's one thing that is characteristic of our society, it is the loss of respect, particularly respect for God-ordained authorities. But when you lose respect a society will crumble, and so God in the Ten Commandments put respect at the heart of godly behaviour, not just for God's sake but for our sake, for community's sake.

Those respects are absolutely vital. Well now that's starting with what God said, what he said about marriage and what he said about betraying marriage with adultery. The word adultery is only applied to illegitimate sin of a married person or with a married person.

It's a word that I want to underline as something that purely applies to married people. God uses other words for sexual sins outside marriage, but that's the serious one because it betrays a covenant that you have made in God's sight. Let me move on to what Moses said.

There is one passage in the Bible in which Moses talks about divorce and remarriage. It's in Deuteronomy 24, and still Christians argue about this passage because it's considered to apply to Christians, but I don't believe it does. Nevertheless, Deuteronomy 24 shows that Moses allowed divorce and remarriage.

He accepted it for the Israelites and he legislated for it. He told them, if you divorce your wife you write out a bill of divorce and you give it to her, and that gives her the freedom to find another partner. This was quoted to Jesus by people when they were discussing it with him.

They quoted Deuteronomy. It's part of the law of Moses. It's part of the Israeli culture.

So there has been a big debate about Deuteronomy 24. When you read it carefully, it doesn't forbid divorce and it doesn't forbid second or even third marriages. What it does prohibit is that if a woman is divorced, marries another and is divorced again, she must not return to her first husband and marry him again.

That's all that's in Moses' law. That's the only legislation he made. He said it will defile the land if you go back to your first husband and remarry him.

Now this is still in Deuteronomy. I want to emphasise that I don't believe I'm under Moses' laws. If I was, I'm breaking them at this moment.

He said, you must never wear cloth that is mixed material. I got this in a modern shop that mixes cotton and wool with polystyrene and I don't know what else, but I'm wearing a mixture of material. I'm disobeying Moses' law.

But I believe the New Testament tells us clearly we're not under Moses' law. Therefore we're not under Deuteronomy law. Therefore this law of divorce and remarriage doesn't apply to me.

But still people argue about on what ground Moses allowed divorce and therefore remarriage. Here we're up against a problem, because the first divorce the lady has in this passage is for an indecent thing. And we don't know what that indecent thing was.

It's a word associated with nakedness, but we just don't know and therefore we can't use that now. We don't know what it is. Later I'll show you that the Jewish scribes were arguing about the meaning of that indecent thing.

The one thing that is absolutely clear is that it wasn't adultery, because that was a crime that was punishable by death. They stoned adulterers to death. I remember standing on the balcony of a building in the Middle East with a friend and we looked down and in the dusty road below I saw a group of Arabs hauling a girl by the hair in the dust and she was totally naked.

I said to my friend, what are they doing to that girl? I was new to the Middle East. I said, what are they doing to that girl? He said, they're going to stone her. I said, why? Because she's committed adultery.

They've found her in the act. Boy, that brought one passage in the New Testament home to me, but I could do nothing to stop it and we had to stand. He said, don't interfere.

If you do, you're interfering with the law because that is the law of Sharia and it was also the law of Moses that anybody guilty of adultery was stoned to death. So the reason of an indecent thing for the first divorce of the woman in Deuteronomy 24 was certainly not adultery. I don't know what it was.

What we do know is the reason for her second divorce from her second husband, which is simply said to be he disliked her. So Moses allowed divorce for this indecent thing, which was not adultery, and for being disliked by her husband. The one thing Moses forbade was she doesn't go back to her first husband.

That would be offensive to God. Well that's what Moses said. Moses in Deuteronomy 22 said another thing which is very relevant.

In Jewish culture, in Israeli law, in the law of Moses, a girl was required to be a virgin when she married. Indeed, if the husband, the bridegroom, found that she wasn't, he could demand her death penalty. He could certainly send her back to her family - second hand goods.

So the lack of virginity at the marriage was punishable by death. Now that's a relevant subject. It will come up later this evening when we get to Jesus' teaching.

But it's an interesting insight into Jewish culture. Jewish culture has very much favoured the male. He was not required to be a virgin, but she was.

So if she was accused of not being, her father had to produce proof in the forms of a bloody sheet that proved she was a virgin when she married. If he couldn't produce that proof, then the marriage ended and she was lucky if she wasn't stoned to death. Now that's what Moses said, but I am not under Moses' law.

I'm so glad about that. One day I was telephoned from Israel where some Israeli believers and some Palestinian Arab believers were together, but they were having endless trouble getting peace. They said, we need somebody from outside to come in and knock our heads together.

And the one name that was acceptable to both was my name. So they telephoned and said, will you come out please and bring us peace? I made an enquiry and the British Airways said it will cost £800 sterling. I hadn't got that and I couldn't expect them to raise it, so I thought I couldn't go.

So I went to another airport, Luton airport, and said, would you have a plane going to Israel? They said, we've got one leaving today. Oh, I said, could I get on to it? They said, no, every seat is booked. I said, well, I really need to get out there urgently.

Finally they said, well, would you mind sitting on a crew seat? You know those upright tip-up seats facing backwards? I said, I don't care if I have to lie on the floor if you let me go. But I sat on a tip-up seat and I

said, how much would you charge me for that? And they said £120. Meanwhile, I didn't know out in Israel the young people had pooled the money they had and they'd come to £120 in shekels, and they had it waiting for me when I got out.

Well, I sat on the seat and I'm facing three rabbis and I realised I'm the only gentile on the plane. So I began a conversation with these three rabbis and I said, excuse me, do you mind if I ask you, do you keep the law of Moses? Of course I do. I said, well, what about this one? Oh, he said, no, we don't keep that one.

I said to the second, do you keep the law of Moses? Sure. I said, what about this one? Well, we can't keep that one because we don't have a temple now. Oh, I said, to the third one, do you keep the law of Moses? Same thing happened.

I said, well, three rabbis and none of you are keeping the law of Moses. And they said, what are you, reformed, orthodox? What are you? And I said, none of those. And one of them looked into my eyes and said, you're a Christian.

He said, you think because Jesus died you don't need to keep the law of Moses. I said, that's right, and I'm so relieved because you three can't keep it. I could never keep the law.

Well, we had a great discussion and a kosher meal, but the plane landed all too soon. I'm not under the law of Moses. The New Testament says it's now obsolete.

It was temporary until Christ came, and I do rejoice in that. I'm under the new covenant and the Mosaic was the old one, and it's out of date. It's passed its sell by date.

So really discussing what Moses said about divorce and remarriage is interesting but irrelevant. So we move on to what the prophets said about divorce and remarriage, and there are three prophets who did say quite a bit. One was Hosea.

What a man Hosea was. One day God said to Hosea, I want you to go and get married. Well, that quite pleased him, but then God added, I want you to marry a prostitute.

What? A preacher marries prostitutes - headlines! But he married her, and God said, you'll have three children but I'm afraid they won't all be yours. One day she's going to go back on the streets and leave you, and you ought to go after her and find her again and buy her back from the pimp controlling her, bring her back to the house, discipline her and then love her again. And then what, Lord? Then you can go and tell Israel, that's how I feel about her.

It's an amazing little prophecy. What a thing that the prophet was called to do to demonstrate God's feelings. But it tells you something.

Go and get her back again, discipline her, forgive her, and love her all over again. That's how I feel. And then we turn to Jeremiah, and in Jeremiah 8 God says, relating to Israel's awful sin, I'm divorcing you.

I'm going to write out a bill of divorcement and you're to get out of this land, you're to go to Babylon, because I'm finished with you. But that's not the last word. If it were, then people who argue that if God can divorce they can would be wrong, because later in Jeremiah God says, but I'm going to bring you back.

What Hosea did God said, I'll do with Israel. I'll bring you back from Babylon so he wasn't splitting with her forever. It was a temporary divorce.

He would bring her back and he would not marry another, and he made her a promise that they would live together again, which is not the kind of divorce that we're thinking of. Then Malachi. When we read the Bible right through aloud in our church, it takes eighty-four hours, and we had two thousand people came to listen, and we sold half a tonne of Bibles.

It was a great time. But one lady who put her name down to read for fifteen minutes did not tell us that immediately after she'd read she was going to the lawyer to start divorce proceedings against her husband. Now nobody knew what part of the Bible they would be reading because they just had to pick up the Bible when somebody stopped and read on for a quarter of an hour, and she picked up Malachi.

Guess what she read? I hate divorce, says the Lord. She never got to that lawyer and her marriage failed. She stayed with her husband just as a result of reading the Bible.

Well, I could tell you more stories about that, but that was a lovely one. Let's move on to what the scribes said. When God stopped speaking to Israel for three hundred years between the Old and the New Testament, they had no prophets, no word from the Lord.

What they could do was examine what God had already said. In other words, work through the scriptures, take the words of the prophets that they'd got already and minutely examine them and apply them. Therefore they were called scribes - the people who virtually wrote out the laws so that people understood them.

There was a huge debate among the scribes about what Moses meant by that indecent thing. There were three leading scribes with three different views. I mention this because when Jesus came they asked him which of these scribes he lined up with, and the answer was none of them.

Nevertheless, there was a hot debate about divorce and remarriage at the time of Jesus between these scribes. One of them, who was a narrow-minded scribe, a conservative scribe, was called Shammai. Shammai said there was only one possible ground for divorce and that was adultery.

But Hillel, his rival scribe who was more broadly minded, he said, anything that offends the husband is a ground for divorce. For divorce was a male thing. It was the husband who divorced the wife invariably in their situation.

He said, a husband can divorce his wife for overcooking the meal and burning it, for talking to men in the street, for shouting too loud. In other words, whatever offended the husband was a valid ground for divorce. Later there came another rabbi called Akiba.

Actually he was after the time of Jesus, but he took it one stage further. He said, you can divorce for any reason you like, or even none at all. If you are just tired of being married, divorce her and find someone else.

Now it is interesting the progression of thought, starting with adultery only of Shammai, then to anything that offended the husband in Hillel's teaching, and finally to any reason or none at all. Anybody could just freely divorce. That is the situation now in England.

We began with divorce for adultery. It then became divorce for a number of reasons, and now legally in Britain you don't even need to have a reason. If two people want to divorce, they can do so after two years' notice.

If only one of them wants the divorce, they have to wait five years, but they don't have to have a reason for divorce at all. That's one reason why it's become so common in my country. Now when Jesus came, he came right into the middle of that debate.

So it was inevitable that he would be asked about it. What do you think about divorce and remarriage? He answered and gave his answer, and we're going to look at that now. It is no wonder that he was asked, because everybody was discussing it.

It was a common debate, and it was usually the Pharisees who asked him for his opinion, because they were well into divorce. They were very religious, they were very wealthy usually, and therefore they were changing their wives for a later model. That was quite frequent among the Pharisees.

So they came to Jesus and said, what do you think? They usually asked him when he was on the east bank of the Jordan River. Did you realise the significance of that? That was in the realm governed by Herod Junior. John the Baptist had said, you are not legally married in God's sight for his second marriage.

For that, John the Baptist paid with his life. He had his head chopped off and brought into King Herod on a plate. It was in Herod's territory that they asked Jesus, what do you think about divorce and remarriage? Perhaps hoping that Jesus would say something that would get him imprisoned and have his head chopped off.

So when these questions were asked, it's interesting to look at where they were asked, and the Bible tells us where. It was a trick question really to get Jesus into trouble. But they were also interested in, is he going to take the strict line, adultery only, like Shammai? Or will he take a more liberal line like Hillel? Or will he take his own line? So let's begin to look at what Jesus said, because for the Christian I believe that's the most important question.

We're followers of Jesus and what he said on this subject should go for every Christian. Now there's no doubt about it that Jesus was against divorce and remarriage. But I want to look at three aspects of this.

First, I want to look at his explanation for that negative attitude which he gives us in the gospel of Luke and the gospel of Mark. Then having looked at his explanation for his attitude, I want to look at the exception he made to his rule, for he did make one exception, and that's the centre of Christian discussion today. I'm sorry that people, when they discuss what Jesus said about divorce, go straight for the exception and try and enlarge the loophole to include most divorces and remarriages.

But an exception always refers to a minority of cases, otherwise it would be the rule. But we shall look at the exception which occurs in Matthew. So the explanation is in Mark and Luke, the exception is in Matthew, and then we shall look thirdly at the example of Jesus which you find in John.

So that's our little structured outline for what Jesus said. First of all, his explanation. Why was he against divorce and remarriage? The answer is really very simple.

You find it most plainly stated in Luke where he said to the Pharisees, anyone who divorces his wife and marries another is committing adultery, and anyone who marries a divorcee is committing adultery. Now the interesting thing about that simple statement in Luke is this. He called remarriage after divorce adultery.

He said remarrying after divorce is breaking the seventh commandment. But the significance of that is this. If adultery can only be committed by a married person, then a person who is divorced and remarried is still married to the first partner in God's sight.

Now that's so important, I want you to really grasp that. If getting divorced and marrying someone else is adultery, it means that in God's sight the divorce is not valid. That person is still married and therefore when they have sex with another partner in a remarriage they are committing adultery against the first partner.

That's his explanation of why he was so strong about divorce and remarriage. He said it's breaking the fundamental commandment of God not to commit adultery. It's the sin of a married person.

So divorce has not dissolved the marriage, it has not ended the first marriage. That's a very important thing to realise. In Jesus' sight, and therefore in God's sight, a divorce does not end a marriage.

The person is still married and therefore remarriage becomes adultery for that reason. Now that's the rule of Jesus. That is general rule before he made an exception, but that's the rule that we need to get hold of.

Remarriage is adultery. That's why I've called my book, Remarriage is Adultery Unless, and the unless allows for an exception. Jesus didn't make an exception.

Let's turn to that now in Matthew. In Matthew 5 and Matthew 19 there's a little clause, except in the case of. In both passages he is saying the same basic thing - remarriage after divorce is adultery except in the case of.

This is where we've run into deep waters, and this is where Christians are divided and there's an awful lot of discussion. I have about twenty-five books on divorce and remarriage on my shelves, all holding different views and all written by evangelical Christians. The confusion on this issue is widespread, and that means that you can always find an evangelical pastor who will agree with your remarriage.

You just need to shop around. Because there's such a variety of understanding Jesus' words, just go round the pastors until you find one who will agree with you and remarry you, or at least accept you into church membership after you've remarried. That's the result of today.

I'm afraid now with cars, automobiles, every Christian has a choice of at least forty churches, if not more. You've got a thousand churches I gather in Kansas City and District, you can just shop around and change churches when you don't like one. That's made church discipline impossible because you just shop around until you find a church that will accept you.

I wish churches would get together and discipline their members together so that what one church does the other churches will back up. But that's not the case now. We've got this huge variety of opinion, and if you are divorced and want to remarry you won't have any difficulty finding a church that will do it for you.

But it's Jesus we're dealing with, not pastors. Jesus made one exception to his rule that remarriage after divorce is adultery. It's about that exception that we have so much variety of opinion and so much discussion.

The real problem at the basis of this exception is that Jesus didn't use the word adultery. He used a quite different word, a word that is translated in the King James Version as fornication. It's not the word adultery, and yet many modern versions have assumed that he made the exception of adultery.

The New International Version, the NIV, the nearly infallible version I call it, that actually has except for marital infidelity, which is simply another way of saying adultery. This is now a widely accepted meaning of that word. But why didn't Jesus use the word? Because he does use it in the very next sentence.

Whoever marries the divorced person is committing adultery, so he knew the word. But he didn't make that word the exception. To give you the Greek version, in case you want to look it up, the word for adultery, the sin of a married person, is moikhia.

The word that Jesus used for the exception is pornia, from which we get our word pornography. The word pornia has about it a kind of commercial sense - sex for money. It was used of prostitution, it was used of brothels, and it really meant sex for money.

But it was a wider word than that. Now there are three different possibilities for treating that word pornia or fornication, and that's where all the problems arise. The three possibilities - I'm going to be quite honest with you and give you all three possible interpretations and then tell you which one convinces me.

The first possibility is that pornia and moikhia, fornication and adultery, mean the same thing. They are synonyms, words that have the same meaning. Jesus simply used another word as a normal literary device.

When I'm writing a book, I often want another word of the same meaning just to give a bit of variety to my writing, and so I have a book of synonyms that I look up. Now that's the first possibility, that when Jesus said pornia, fornication, he meant adultery. That's a very common opinion, even though it isn't the same word.

The second possibility, which is the wider interpretation adopted by many evangelicals, including IHOP, which you will find, is this - that fornication is a wide word including adultery but including other sexual sins. It's a very wide word so that it includes adultery as just one example of fornication. Others would be homosexuality, buggery - a whole lot of things, including possibly masturbation.

So that's the second view of this word exception fornication, that it's a wide word meaning any sexual sin. It's a very sexual word, it's a very sinful word, and it includes adultery but includes other things as well. And that's probably one of those common - sorry, I said IHOP believes the second, IHOP believes the first, I gather - that it's simply adultery, nothing more, nothing less.

But when you get to that second interpretation, you can include so many other things and it would make divorce very common indeed. The third interpretation, which I'm honest enough to say is mine and which I believe is the meaning and why Jesus used a different word, is that fornication is not adultery at all. So either you believe that fornication and adultery are synonyms referring to the same thing, adultery, or you believe that fornication is a wider word including adultery and many other things, or thirdly, you believe that fornication and adultery are two entirely different things.

And that's my view. I want to give you the reasons for that view because they are very compelling. It's a very persuasive case and if you want to get it in full you will need to read the book.

The first reason is this. Fornication and adultery are listed many times in the New Testament together in the same list side by side, but clearly referring to different things. Even in Matthew's Gospel there's a list of the sins that come out of a heart, and it says fornication comes out of the heart, adultery comes out of the heart.

Well, surely they couldn't mean the same thing, or Jesus is just repeating himself. It could just mean that fornication includes adultery, but why leave them, why list them side by side? Furthermore, there are lists in the New Testament of sinners as well as sins, and you find in those lists fornicators and adulterers listed separately side by side. That begins to tell me that they are two very different things, and two very different kinds of sin, and two very different kinds of sinner.

So what could be the difference? We know that adultery is the sexual sin of a married person. The most obvious explanation of fornication is that it's sexual sin of a single person, that the one is committed before marriage and the other after marriage. As soon as you say that, you've got a full explanation why Mark and Luke never mention an exception, but why Matthew does.

Because as you study Matthew's Gospel it is very clearly intended for Jewish believers. It's the most Jewish of the four Gospels. Perhaps that's why it's put first in the New Testament, though it wasn't written first, but it's the one that has most in common with the Old Testament.

It begins with the genealogy of Jesus, the family tree of Jesus. If you're writing a book for Gentiles, what would be the point of beginning with that? But if you're writing for Jews that is the most important thing to begin with, to show that Jesus was son of David. So Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus.

I have met now two Jews who came to faith in Jesus through reading his genealogy in Matthew 1. I came across one just a week ago in England, a Jew who read Matthew 1 and thought, Jesus must be the Messiah with a family tree like that. Then a second reason why we believe Matthew was written for Jewish believers is that he constantly says that it might be fulfilled that the prophet has spoken. The other Gospels don't say that, but Matthew's always saying it.

They went down into Egypt that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, I have called my son out of Egypt, and so on. He's constant in taking a promise from the Old Testament and saying, now it's come true. That appeals to a Jew.

It doesn't convince Gentiles. It's a Jewish argument. I could go on.

One of the most telling arguments is that Matthew never talks about the kingdom of God. Instead, everything is the kingdom of heaven. Now you have to understand that Jews hate to say the word God in case they take God's name in vain.

Even in the newspapers where it says God, it has big G dash little d to avoid saying the name of God. Read any issue of the Jerusalem Chronicle and you'll see that they are scared stiff of one of the other commandments. They dare not pronounce the name of God.

I've often tried to get a Jew to tell me how to pronounce what I think is Yahweh, the name of God that he gave to Moses. And you know, I say to a Jew in a casual way, how do you pronounce the name of God?

And he says, yeah, no, you're not going to get me to say that, and I cannot persuade them to. They dare not take his name in vain.

So they don't talk about God, they talk about heaven. It's the origin of the saying, heaven help you. They will say that to you.

You pray and heaven will help you. So they say not the kingdom of God but the kingdom of heaven, whereas Mark and Luke, which were not written for Jewish believers but for Gentiles, they use kingdom of God quite freely. They don't have any exception to the rule.

I could go on, but there are five or six major reasons why we believe Matthew was written for the first believers who were Jewish, written for the Jewish believers in the land we call Palestine. It was a Jewish gospel. Therefore, that is why there is an exception to the divorce and remarriage rule in this Jewish gospel.

Jesus is referring to sexual sin before marriage, that culture I told you about in Deuteronomy 22 that demanded that a bride be a virgin. That is what it is referring to. It is sexual sin before marriage.

It is sexual sin of a single person - fornication. Adultery is what happens in sin after marriage. So Jesus is upholding the Jewish culture here.

This, of course, is exactly what happened to his own parents. Before his parents got married - they were both teenagers at the time - but before they got married they found she was pregnant. Now they were betrothed to marriage.

We would say engaged to be married, but we don't take engagement nearly as seriously as the Jews. Betrothal engagement to the Jew is commitment to marriage. You are totally committed to the marriage now, and therefore if you break the engagement they called it divorce because you are committed.

So Joseph, when he found that Mary was pregnant, being a just man he resolved to do it privately, but he did think he should divorce her. That would have been Jewish culture. She was second-hand goods.

He had every right to divorce her, not even that, he had a duty to divorce her. She had been unfaithful to him. Then Joseph had a dream.

As I told you on Monday morning, dear Joseph was like his namesake. He had dreams and God gave him messages and God said, look, it's all right, she's not been unfaithful, she's not had sex with anyone else, God has made her pregnant. To my amazement, this young man Joseph believed it - the first man ever to believe such a thing.

Well, it was the first time it had ever happened. I think it's lovely that immediately Joseph had that dream. He married her and took the blame for her pregnancy and protected her and had to take her all the way to Bethlehem because nobody would have anything to do with her, because even premarital sex between the engaged couple was frowned on.

So nobody would help her and he had to take her on that long journey. But that was a classic case of an exception in which the divorce was right. Had Mary been guilty of premarital promiscuity? Now the more I have looked at the three interpretations of the exception, the more I am convinced that the third is the one.

It explains why the exception is in Matthew and not in Mark and not in Luke, because Mark and Luke were both written for Gentile culture, for Gentiles, in which premarital promiscuity was a normal thing, as I'm afraid now is in American society. I've asked pastors, do you, when a couple wants to be married and come to you, do you ask them if they are already having sex? Not a single pastor has said yes to that question that I've asked. But that's when they should be talking about this.

That's the time to tell couples about it. But it's become so normal. You watch the royal wedding, everybody knows they've had sex together before they were married.

Even the commentators mentioned it. One of them said, well anyway, they've had good practice so they don't need a honeymoon now, and they didn't have one. But it's right at the top of the tree now among our royalty.

It's assumed that couples have already slept together before they ask for marriage. So that that part of Jewish culture, which was godly culture, is now out of date, and it was then in the Roman world. Pre-marital promiscuity was everywhere, and so that exception of pre-marital promiscuity is missed out in the gospels meant for the Gentiles.

That doesn't mean that it was right, for it's still fornication. But it does mean that Jesus' exception didn't apply, because that emphasis on virginity as a requirement in marriage was not found in any Roman or Greek society. It was never part of the law.

It was only part of the Jewish law. So Jesus is upholding the Jewish culture, I believe, in making that the exception. It does mean, of course, and we have to be honest here, if that is the right interpretation - and it's not the interpretation of the majority evangelical, including IOP - but if it is the right interpretation, then it means that nothing after marriage is a legitimate reason for divorce.

The only exception that Jesus intended, I am saying, is for pre-marital promiscuity, nothing else. Now, of course, so many reasons are used, even cruelty, insanity of one partner. This and these and many other causes are now being cited as legitimate grounds for divorce.

If Jesus is taken seriously, I would dare say that most divorces are wrong, and remarriage after those divorces has been prohibited by the Lord Jesus. Why is the church not saying anything? I can respect those who say that he made adultery the only exception, though I cannot agree with them, but I can respect that as a different view. But even given that, the church has gone strangely silent because there are just so many divorces, not only among evangelical Christians but among their leaders, among nationally learned figures, and I could name internationally known American ministries who have divorced and remarried.

I was in another country recently, and I went to the biggest church in the country that claims to be the biggest church in the world. In fact, the minister, the pastor, was on his third marriage, and I heard that was beginning to be shaky as well. Nobody says a thing.

The pastor simply carries on. But I did go to another large church in that same country where they discipline members properly, scripturally, and they were excommunicating a member, a lady in the church, who was determined to leave her husband and marry another man. The church said, no, you can't do that and remain a member in this church.

She will almost certainly go down the road and find another church. But guess which church is getting all the publicity in the press? The one where the pastor is on his third wife, or the church that disciplines a member for determined to marry someone she isn't entitled to? Well, it's the church that is disciplining, that everybody is gossiping around. What a world we live in.

It's a crazy world, isn't it? In fact, because people are now consumer Christians, they simply shop around from one church to another until they find one they like, and discipline becomes impossible. When a church disciplines a member for anything, they simply change churches to another that will accept them. But discipline is a mark of a New Testament church.

It is not an individual decision. The way we behave is of concern to the community, and there are examples in the New Testament of churches disciplining membership. Well now, all this I have said in full in the book so you can read it there, but that's where the discussion centres.

What did Jesus mean by fornication? I have given you those three possible answers. First, that it means adultery only, which is the view here and in many evangelical churches. Second, that fornication means far more than adultery and many other sexual perversions.

Thirdly, that fornication is limited to the single and to premarital promiscuity. You must study yourself. But finally, I would like to talk about the example of Jesus.

In John's gospel we have got Jesus' example of how he behaved when he encountered this situation. There are two examples, both concerning women - one the woman at the well of Samaria and the other the woman caught in adultery. Let's look at those two examples.

The first example, Jesus was thirsty and asked the woman for a drink which surprised her because she said, Jews and Samaritans don't drink from the same vessels. You know, when I was at Jacob's well in Samaria once, there was an aluminium cup and you could drop it by a chain into that well and drink the actual water from the actual well of Jacob, and it was sweet, clear, cool water - most refreshing. So I had a drink from this aluminium cup and it was wonderful, it was a blistering hot day.

Then I handed it to a lady and said, you have a drink, it's wonderful. She said, oh no, you don't know who's been drinking from that. That's exactly what happened when Jesus asked for a drink at that very well.

She was surprised that he would drink from a cup that a Samaritan had used. And so Jesus began to talk to her about living water that he could give her and she would never be thirsty again. So she argued about that and said, oh, that's fine, I don't need to come to the well for water, give me this living water.

She was being flippant. So he brought her down to her as a bump and said, you have had five husbands and the man you're living with now you're not married to. And that really was the truth.

His word of knowledge about her condition really struck her heart. She ran off to the village from which she'd come and said, come and meet a man who told me everything about me, he must be a prophet. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the end of the story was what Jesus told her to do? No.

But we don't have it. We don't know how he counselled her. He could have said, go back to husband number five, go back to number four, three, two, or one.

He could have told her to marry the man she was living with. He could have told her she must remain single for the rest of her life. He could have told her, now you believe in me, you're free to marry anyone as long as he also believes in me.

Eight different things he could have told her and we have no idea. So I'm afraid I've got to say that example doesn't help us one little bit. So let's turn to the other example.

The other example was where they brought the woman caught in adultery to him and said, Moses said we must stone her to death. What do you say? It was a trap actually. It was deliberately engineered or manipulated to catch him out.

Would he agree to her death or not? It's a wonderful story and Gentiles don't understand it. You've got to get a Jew to tell you the story. When a Jew tells you, you'll see it totally differently.

For one thing, Jewish law said that the man and the woman must be stoned to death, and they brought the woman but not the man, which was grossly unfair and wrong. Next thing, Jewish culture rightly says that you cannot be a witness for the prosecution in a case when you have committed the same sin or the same crime, and that's good justice. When Jesus said, let him that is without sin throw the first stone, he didn't mean you've got to be sinless before you can punish anyone.

That's ridiculous. Nobody is. It would mean that no parent could punish a child, no policeman cooperated.

He didn't mean you've got to be perfect before you punish. He was quoting Jewish law. You must not have committed adultery, and then you can be a witness for the prosecution, then you can throw the stones.

He challenged the men who'd brought her, if you haven't committed a sin, this sin, then you throw the first stone. They one by one crept away, the older ones first, the young ones tried to brazen it out, but then they too left. While that was going on, Jesus had written with his finger in the dust of the earth.

We're not told what he wrote, but to a Jew that is highly significant because God wrote the commandment, you shall not commit adultery, with his finger. Jesus writing with his finger would remind those Jews of God writing the Ten Commandments, and may even have been writing, you shall not commit adultery. When Jesus looked up and said to the woman, where are your accusers? She said, they've gone.

Now Jewish law also says you've got to have two or three witnesses in every case. But there were no witnesses now, and Jesus himself hadn't witnessed the adultery, so he couldn't. So he rightly said, case dismissed, neither do I condemn you.

He was not forgiving her. He was not saving her. He was simply saying, case dismissed, we can't proceed, there are no witnesses, so I can't condemn you, can't be your judge.

Then he said the most significant thing of all to that woman. He said, go and don't do it again. But he actually didn't say that.

The verb he uses is rightly translated as it is in the New International Version, go and leave your life of sin, because he was using the present continuous tense. What he meant was, this was not a one-night stand, you're in a regular, ongoing, adulterous situation. Leave it.

Go and sin no more. Go and leave your life of sin. What would Jesus have said if she was brought back in six months having done it all over again? We do not know.

But the point I want to make, that she was in a regular, adulterous relationship with someone. Whether she was the married one or the man was the married one, we don't know. But she was in an adulterous relationship and Jesus told her, you're to get out of it, you're to finish it.

Now what does that mean if remarriage after divorce is adultery, an ongoing, adulterous relationship? What would Jesus say to that? I'm going to leave you to reach your own conclusion, but I have reached one. He told an adulteress to get out of the relationship and to stop sinning. That's very serious, but he said it.

I must now move very quickly on to what Paul said. Here we have to deal with a strange development in church history. There was a called Erasmus, a Dutchman who was a Christian and a humanist - unusual combination, but he was both.

He was very sympathetic to couples who had divorced and remarried. He searched the scripture to try and find another ground than the one Jesus made for an exception. He claimed to have found it in Paul's writings.

Now there are three relevant passages in Paul to this issue. One is Romans chapter 7 where Paul takes exactly the same line as Jesus and says, if a woman divorces and remarries she is called an adulteress, and marriage is for life and we are only released from it by the death of a partner. That's in Romans 7. But in 1 Corinthians 7 he says much, much more.

It is in that chapter that Erasmus found a second exception, namely desertion. Since Erasmus was teaching at the time of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther picked up this second exception, so did Calvin, so did the Reformed churches and the Lutheran churches, which have since taught two exceptions - one from Jesus, one from Paul. One from Jesus, fornication, whatever that is, and one from Paul, desertion.

He did it because Paul says, if a woman is married, if anyone is married to an unbeliever, presumed because one has become a believer after the marriage and it's an unequal yoke, what should the believer do? He says, the believer must not divorce, must not leave the marriage. But he said, if the unbeliever wants to get out of the marriage, let him go, let him go. On that basis Erasmus said, so desertion is a ground for divorce, especially since Paul goes on to say, the believer must be bound.

Erasmus said, there you are. The bond of marriage is released when the unbeliever deserts. Notice that it has to be an unbeliever, not another believer.

But he said, if an unbelieving partner wants out, let him go because the believer is not bound, and he interpreted that to mean he is free to remarry someone else. But it's a mistranslation. The verb for bound is nothing like the word Paul uses everywhere and in the same chapter for the marriage bond.

The word he actually uses is enslaved. Marriage, says Paul, is not slavery, and the verb is used in the past tense referring to the wedding in the past, not to the future marriages. Referring to the wedding in the past he says, for the believer was not enslaved in the marriage.

It's not the same thing as slavery. That's why the believer should let the unbeliever go, but Paul is not discussing what their future is at all. When you look at the rest of the chapter, Paul takes the same harsh line as Jesus did.

Earlier in the chapter he says, husbands must not divorce their wives, wives must not divorce their husbands, and he titles that, I'm not telling you this from myself, this is what the Lord said. So he makes that strong statement, no divorce, on the basis of the Lord Jesus' teaching. In between those two statements some versions translate this statement, but if she does separate, let her remain single or be reconciled to her husband.

Many have misunderstood that because, again, it's in the past tense. What he was saying, wives you must not divorce your husband, but if you are already separated, if you are already divorced, the options are to remain single or be reconciled to your former married partner. But he does not say you're free to marry again.

He is thinking of the case where somebody has become a Christian who is already divorced, and he says the options are remain single or be reconciled. 1 Corinthians 7 ends with an absolutely clear statement that only death can set a person free from the marriage bond - a different word. Then he adds, but though you are free, you must marry someone who is a fellow Christian, another believer, otherwise you are deliberately forming an unequal yoke with a non-believer.

Now I know a number of girls who have married a boy that they love, hoping that they will convert him after the marriage. That is extremely unlikely to happen because he doesn't want a wife who is telling him what to do, and it rarely happens. But other girls have married boys who during the engagement have professed to be a Christian, but it's only been a profession, and as soon as they are married he drops church and it dies away.

Girls, you must be very careful to marry a believer who is more mature than you are and can lead you in the marriage. Don't marry a recent believer until he is quite sure that he is developing and maturing. These things need to be said now before you marry.

So I do not believe that Paul was actually adding an exception. Again, we've covered an awful lot of ground. It's all in the book and you need to read the book and read it carefully.

There is a third passage that Paul wrote which is relevant where he said, for elders, one of the qualifications of an elder in the church should be that they have one wife. There are three possible translations or interpretations or applications of that statement. One is that he's saying, if you've got more than one wife, if you're a polygamist you're not fit to be an elder in the church.

But I don't think that's what he's saying. Alas, the early church interpreted him to mean only married once, so that a Christian whose partner has died, a man whose wife has died and married again then is not eligible to be an elder. But that is the wrong interpretation because it goes against Paul's teaching elsewhere.

I think it means quite simply that if a man is married but has another married partner still alive, then he should not be an elder in the church. It's going to be a bad example to the rest of the church. In other words, a man who's divorced and remarried as a Christian should never be an elder in the church of Christ.

I think that's the only possible explanation of that phrase, only one wife. Well now, I'm not going to go - we don't have time to go through what the church has said, but the confusion in the church - you can just pick any attitude to divorce and remarriage and find it somewhere in church history. So I'm just going to leave

that.

In any case, tradition has no authority over me as a Christian. Scripture has. That's the important point.

So let me come to my last chapter - what we should say. Of course, the real thing is, when should we say it? I urge pastors among you, don't wait until you've got a crisis on your hand before you teach what Jesus said. Don't wait - do it now before the crisis arrives.

I had to save a Baptist pastor from suicide, and I'll tell you why he was intent on taking his life. He had been forced to marry some divorced people, and he'd done it because both bride and groom belonged to the two families in his church. Those families put such emotional pressure on him to remarry a young man from one family and a girl from another that he gave in to the pressure, lest he upset so many people in his church.

He did the marriage and then was completely overcome with guilt. His conscience so played on him. I knew it was right not to marry them.

I should have said, I can't marry them, but they pressed me to do so - members of the church - and he said, I gave in and I've lived ever since with this terrible conscience. How can God use me as a pastor if I let the people tell me what to do rather than the Lord? He was going to commit suicide and fortunately I heard about him and I got in touch with him and I was able to talk him out of it. He experienced forgiveness for what he'd done.

But he was so overcome with guilt at having given in to pressures within the church from his own families, from his own people. But he knew all along he was doing the wrong thing in the sight of the Lord. We must not be intimidated by people.

We need to fear the Lord rather than people, and then we'll do the right thing. It may be difficult, it may be costly, there may be high emotions in people, but we must do the right thing in the sight of the Lord, whatever the cost or consequence. I promised years ago to the Lord that after studying the Word and listening to other interpretations of it, that when I came to my own understanding, I would tell it as I believed it is, regardless of cost or consequence.

I've kept that promise, and there has been a cost, and there have been many consequences. Nevertheless, I want to be able to stand before God one day and say, I told them the truth. I told them what I believe they needed to hear.

So what are we to say, especially in the most difficult circumstances where someone has already divorced and remarried - maybe more than once, maybe three times, four times - and that's not uncommon? What do we say? Well, the one thing we shouldn't talk about is precedent. Do you know what I mean by that? To match one situation with another. I've been asked to produce a book on divorce and remarriage that covers every possible situation and what to do in it.

It should be a book this thick - the encyclopaedia - because we go by precedent. We want to know what the Lord said in this situation or what the pastor did in that, and then we can copy them. What we do need to live by is not precedent but principle.

There are four principles that apply in that situation. The first principle is sin. Adultery is sin.

Remarriage or divorce is adultery, therefore it is sin. That's the first principle. The second principle - forgiveness.

It is not the unforgivable sin. There is only one unforgivable sin, and that is to call black, white, and white, black - to call the work of the Spirit the work of the devil, and the work of the devil the work of the Spirit. That's unforgivable, said Jesus.

Jesus actually said, you can say anything you like about me, but don't you talk about the Holy Spirit as if he's the devil. The nearer some Christians get to that is to say tongues are of the devil. Have you heard that? It's possible to commit the unforgivable sin, but it's not divorce and it's not remarriage.

All sin is forgivable. The third principle is repentance. Every sin is unforgivable until you repent of it.

Here comes the crucial question - how do people who have already divorced and remarried repent of it? Because repentance in my Bible involves turning away from the sin, not sinning again, breaking off wrong relationships. The fourth principle is discipline. The couple themselves will see only themselves.

They will not see how their example is going to affect the whole community of Christ. But a pastor needs to consider the community as well as the couple, and how their example will affect the young people in his church, for example. The church is called to act in a disciplinary fashion where people are openly and deliberately disobeying the Word of God.

The church, every church, should discipline its members who do that. I am going to finish with a story, a true story, an example in my own ministry where I faced such a situation. I was preaching in a theatre which held about four thousand people, huge place, and we had a wonderful meeting.

At the end I appealed for men who needed to be healed to come forward. About seventy came forward and they were healed by the Lord. It was an amazing meeting.

But after the meeting was over and most people had gone, a couple came to me, a middle-aged couple, and they said, Mr Pawson, are you accusing us of living in sin? I said, I don't know you, I've never met you. How could I accuse you of living in sin? They said, But you said that people who remarried after divorce were living in sin. I said, No, I never said that.

I said, Actually, I was reading the words of Jesus because I had read Luke chapter sixteen before I preached. And they'd heard me say that, but they'd assumed I was saying it or remembered me saying it, but I was just reading from Jesus. I took my Bible and I opened it at Luke sixteen and I said, Would you read that verse to me? They read the verse, Anyone who divorces and remarries is committing adultery, and anyone who marries a divorcee is committing adultery.

They read it aloud to me and I said, Now, I've just heard you say it, and you were reading Jesus as I was reading Jesus. I said, Are you both Christians? They said, Oh yes. Then I said, Does that apply to you? They said, Yes, before we were Christians we both divorced our partners.

Then we met and fell in love and then we came to Jesus as a couple, and that's where we are now. I said, Well, how do Jesus' words fit that situation? They said, Well, didn't he make any exceptions? It's almost the first thing couples say. So I went to the exception in Matthew and I said, Read that to me.

They read it to me and I said, Does the exception fit you? They admitted honestly, No it doesn't. We divorced because we simply fell out of love and fell in love with each other. That was the only reason we divorced.

So I said, You don't fit the exception however it's interpreted. They said, No, we don't. Then they said, Well, I said to them, Once you find out that you're doing something wrong in the sight of the Lord, that you're sinning, what should you do? They said, Ask for forgiveness.

I said, Yes, you need to do that, but there's something you need to do before that. They said, What's that? I said, You need to repent because God can't forgive until you repent. They said, Well, how do we repent? I said, Are you... Well, they then said, Will you pray for us? I said, No, I won't, not yet.

I said, Are you willing to say to the Lord, Whatever you tell us to do to put the situation right in your sight, we will do, whatever it is? I said, Are you willing to tell the Lord that, that you will do whatever he tells you - not what I tell you - but what he tells you to do to put the situation right? They said, But will he tell us to separate, or will he allow us to stay together? I said, That's not for me to say, it's for him to say it. You just tell him that you're willing to do whatever he says. They said, Now will you pray for us? I said, No, not until you're willing to pray for yourselves and say that.

They turned round and left the theatre where we had held the meeting. I have never met them again, but about ten days later I met the pastor of their church. The pastor said, You don't know what you've done to my church.

I said, Why? Well, he said, The following morning - Sunday morning because it had been on a Saturday night - the following morning this couple came to me and they said, We would like to share something with the congregation. We were at David Pawson's meeting last night and we'd like to share something. The pastor thought they'd been healed or blessed or something, and he said, Of course you can share with the congregation.

Come up to the pulpit after I've preached and you can have the microphone. So up to the pulpit they came. The husband spoke and he said, Last night we discovered we were living in sin and we were told that we must tell the Lord we were willing to do whatever he told us to put the situation right.

They said, We're not prepared to pray that prayer. We want to stay together. If he told us you should separate, we couldn't accept that.

He said, We've lain awake all night discussing it. But he said, This morning, just before breakfast, we knelt down together and we said, Lord Jesus, we're in a wrong situation. We are now willing to do whatever you tell us to do to put it right.

He said, It's very difficult for us to hear what the Lord is telling us because we want to stay together. So the husband said to the congregation, Will you please, as our family in Christ, pray and seek the Lord for us and be honest with us and tell us what the Lord is telling all of you that we should do about this wrong situation? The pastor said, You wouldn't believe what happened next. He said, People broke into tears all over the church and men were getting up and confessing adultery and wrong relationships.

He said, Revival has come to our church. He said, You wouldn't believe what's happened. He said, It's changed our church and they were confessing sins all over the church.

We've never had a service like that. It was hours before we went home. I said, Are you sorry that you've got revival in your church? Well, he said, it's a different situation to normal, but he said, Yes, I'm glad it's happened.

Now would you like to know what the church members told that couple the Lord wanted them to do? Would you? I don't know. I forgot to ask. I don't want to know because you would make that a precedent for someone else, do you see? I believe my job was to bring them to repentance where they were willing to do what their Lord and Saviour told them to do, and that's my job finished.

Do you understand me? I'm not to tell them. The Lord must tell them, so I can't tell you and therefore I'm not going to. That's repentance when you say to the Lord, I'm willing to do whatever you tell me to do to put the situation right in your sight.

That's where I'm going to end because that's where I end the book. Get the book and study carefully. I only ask, not that you agree with me, but that you study the situation carefully and biblically and that you ask the crucial questions and that you come to your own convictions.

But listen, on Sunday last I heard this prayer recited in this church, Jesus, I plead your blood over my sins and the sins of my nation, God and abortion, and send revival to America. That is prayed here in Iop every Sunday. It's a good prayer, except that Jesus said nothing about abortion.

I want to add a phrase to that prayer that would be prayed every Sunday here, God and abortion and divorce in this country. Lord Jesus, thank you that you told us the truth. Sometimes we don't always understand straight away what you meant, but Lord, help us to seek the truth and to apply it to our own lives and the lives of other Christians.

Lord, we pray that you'll reverse the trend in the church so that it may be reversed in the nation as well and that family life may be held together and that your church will lead the world uphill instead of following the world downhill and that Christian family life as Jewish family life may be an example upheld for everyone to see. Holy, happy families in which you dwell as Lord and Master. In your name, Jesus, I ask it.

Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/Noqlkx4mUFQ.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/david-pawson/divorce-and-remarriage/>

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