

Theme: Jesus taught that marriage was given by God at creation to be the lifelong union of one man and one woman, and disciples must look to strengthen marriage, not seek excuses to divorce.

## I. Intro - Chaos in the Family - Then and Now!

- A. For many years marriage was clear in America - one man and one woman in a life-long bond
- B. The sexual revolution of the 1960s challenged this
- C. Free love, cohabitation, and no-fault divorce accepted
- D. Obergefell decision (2015) legalized same-sex marriage
- E. Today polyamory is on the rise - "How Did Polyamory Become So Popular?" - New Yorker, 12/25/2023
- F. In the conservative church, the real issue is divorce
- G. The 1<sup>st</sup> century also saw many marriage issues
- H. How do disciples live? What is God's will for marriage?
- I. A plea to hear and do further study - I can't cover everything today (see more teachings in the booklet)
- J. We will take three weeks to cover various questions regarding marriage and divorce.
- K. Also After Hours and previous teachings

## II. The Background Of Today's Text

- A. A hostile test for Jesus
  - Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" Mark 10:2
  - 1. The Pharisees are not coming to learn but to test
  - 2. A hostile intent on their part in posing this question

## B. The traps in this question

Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them. <sup>2</sup>Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" <sup>3</sup> "What did Moses command you?" he replied. <sup>4</sup> They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." Mark 10:1-4

### 1. The arguments in Judaism over divorce

- a. The key text was Deuteronomy 24:1 (Mark 10:4)
  - If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because **he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce**, gives it to her and sends her from his house... Deuteronomy 24:1
- b. Three schools of thought on grounds for divorce
  - The School of Shammai say: A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her, for it is written, "Because he hath found in her indecency in anything." And the School of Hillel say: [He may divorce her] even if she spoiled a dish for him, for it is written, "Because he hath found in her indecency in anything." R. Akiba says: Even if he found another fairer than she, for it is written, "And it shall be if she find no favor in his eyes." (m. Git. 9:10)
  - 1. Shammai - only adultery (indecency)
  - 2. Hillel - many reasons (anything)
  - 3. Akiba - just wants a new wife (no favor in his eyes)
  - 4. All agreed a man could divorce his wife, the only question was the grounds for divorce.
- c. Jesus would alienate many no matter what He said
- d. In general, divorce was widely accepted and practiced in Judaism - favoring men, not women.

2. The situation with Herod and Herodias (and John!)  
Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan... Mark 10:1
  - a. This was where John had baptized and preached
  - b. The jurisdiction of Herod (who put John to death)
  - c. Herodias had divorced her husband (unusual in Judaism) and John had said this was unlawful
  - d. Would Jesus agree with John & get the same fate?
3. How will Jesus respond to this trap?

### III. Jesus' Response: What Is Marriage?

- A. A proper understanding of Deuteronomy 24:1  
"What did Moses **command** you?" he replied. <sup>4</sup> They said, "Moses **permitted** a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." <sup>5</sup> "**It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,**" Jesus replied. Mark 10:3-5
  1. What did Moses command... Moses permitted
  2. Jesus asks for the positive command, and they speak of permission (ἐντέλλω vs. ἐπιτρέπω)
  3. Jesus says Moses gave this command (ἐντολή) because people had hard, stubborn hearts!
  4. Moses gave this command to prevent men from sending away women without divorcing them, which would have left the woman destitute and unable to marry and be cared for in society.
  5. This law does not tell us about marriage, but rather about how wicked humans have become!

6. The understanding of this verse had become a way to make divorce easier - the opposite of its intent!
7. As with the Sabbath, the Pharisees had built up many laws about divorce but had forgotten God's intent in marriage!

#### B. The right question - what is marriage?

"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' <sup>7</sup> 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, <sup>8</sup> and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. <sup>9</sup> Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." Mark 10:6-9

1. As with the Sabbath controversy, Jesus goes back to God's intent and command in creation.
2. The proper place to begin is not in God's laws to control human wickedness but rather in creation to see God's design and intent for marriage.
3. Jesus combines Genesis 1:27 & 2:24 to show there are four key things to understand about marriage
  - a. Humans are created either male or female
  - b. Marriage is the union of male and female
  - c. Marriage is the union of one male and one female
  - d. Marriage joins the two into a lifelong bond
4. Any other understanding or practice is not marriage as given by God for human flourishing and to be a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church.
5. The result - we are not to look for loopholes to get out of marriage but to seek to maintain the marriage bond.

6. God had given laws to regulate divorce and also polygamy because of sin and wickedness - but this was never His intent for marriage.

C. The disciples' questions about this teaching

When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. <sup>11</sup> He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. <sup>12</sup> And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery." Mark 10:10-12

1. Matthew 19:10 - The disciples said "It is better not to marry then!" - they were shocked by this and still had a hard time accepting Jesus' teaching.
2. Jesus says if a man or a woman divorces the spouse and marries another person they are committing adultery.
  - a. This says John was right about Herod and Herodias - they had violated God's commands
  - b. This shocked them because many men divorced so they could be with another woman and not be committing adultery! But Jesus says doing this IS adultery!
  - c. This shocked them because in Judaism the man committed adultery against another man by seducing his wife, but Jesus says it is adultery against his own wife!
  - d. This shocks because few Jewish women had the power to divorce - but Jesus is raising women to the same level as men, which was unheard of at that time!
3. Jesus' teaching radically resets the conversation regarding marriage and divorce, pointing us back to God's intent in marriage, and it calls disciples to live in light of God's design rather than the cultural confusion surrounding us.

## IV. Applying the Word

- A. Understand the full biblical teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage
  1. The Scripture speaks a LOT on this topic
  2. Matthew tells us Jesus gave an exception for adultery that Mark does not point out (more below)  
I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, **except for marital unfaithfulness**, and marries another woman commits adultery." Matthew 19:9
  3. God Himself 'divorced' His unfaithful wife Israel  
I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery. Jeremiah 3:8 (also see Isaiah 50:1)
  4. Paul also says abandonment is cause for divorce (1 Corinthians 7:15)
  5. NOTE: After Hours will talk more about the full biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage.
  6. I have spoken on this several times before - see the booklet or our website topics divorce & remarriage
- B. Understanding and applying Jesus' bracing words
  1. Jesus clearly wanted to discourage divorce!
  2. Mark does not include the 'exception' clause
    - a. It is implied and understood - everyone agreed
    - b. But his original Gentile readers lived in a culture of easy divorce - even for women!

“Surely no woman will blush to be divorced now that some distinguished and noble ladies count the years not by the consuls but by their own marriages, and divorce in order to be married, marry in order to be divorced. Divorce was only dreaded as long as it was unusual; now that no gazette appears without it, women learn to do what they hear so much about. Can anyone feel ashamed of adultery, now that things have come to such a pass that no woman keeps a husband at all unless it be to pique her lover?” (Seneca, On Benefits 3.16.2)

- c. Mark wants to give a strong message against this culture of “no-fault” easy divorce.

3. Disciples need to live by God’s intent and command in creation and Scripture, not by the standards of our culture or by our own desires.

4. This is meant to challenge each of us, and we should not try to escape or dismiss it quickly as it relates to our lives.

#### C. Closing words for different groups

1. Those who are happily married

- a. Give thanks to God each day for your spouse!
- b. Invest in and protect your marriage - more in a future teaching
- c. Pray for and encourage others in their marriage
- d. Don’t engage in “cancel” culture for those whose marriages have ended in divorce - be a channel of grace.

2. Those who are struggling in their marriage

- a. God wants your marriage to make it if at all possible!

b. Don’t give up without a lot of prayer, a long fight to stay in the marriage, counseling, etc. God’s will is for marriage to last - and He can raise the dead!

c. If you need help in your marriage or you have questions, please contact me so we can talk

3. Those who have divorced and possibly remarried

a. As I said above, some divorces are legitimate

b. However, most divorces do not meet the biblical criteria

c. We need to be honest, and if we sinned in getting a divorce, or committed adultery in a previous marriage, we go to Jesus, confess, and He forgives!

#### D. The Table of Grace

1. We come to this Table by grace, for all have sinned

2. We come to this Table to receive grace, for all strength to help in our times of need!

3. Come and receive!

#### Lessons for Disciples - Marriage (Part 1)

Mark 10:1-12

March 3, 2024

Communion

2 John 1:3

Teaching keywords: Marriage and family; Divorce and remarriage; Kingdom of God; discipleship; creation

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love. 2 John 1:3

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