

“LET NO MAN PUT ASUNDER.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Mark 10:1-12

Introduction.

In our series on Mark's Gospel we are returning to this text again this morning. You will recall last week we laid a foundation for Biblical marriage and set the foundation on three foundation stones.

First, God created marriage so marriage belongs to God.

Second, God defined marriage as an exclusive and permanent bond between one man and one woman.

[I came across something this week that fit well with that second point from last week.

God took Adam who was one and alone and divided him into two pieces. From the second piece God created a woman and brought her back to Adam in order that the two could become one again (from Doug Wilson, *For a Glory and a Covering*, p. 31).

Third, God performs marriage, it's His doing, not the couples, not the ministers, not the states.

Matthew 19:6 What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.

This is the message of Jesus to His disciples and to all who wish to be His disciples. Marriage belongs to God, marriage is defined by God and marriage is performed by God. We don't have the right or the freedom to change it or redefine it, not even politicians or presidents.

But we live in a sinful, broken, hurting, imperfect world. And when two sinners get married, sinful things happen, "living happily ever afterward" is hard to achieve. So what happens then? In our culture the answer is increasingly divorce.

Just Google the word divorce to see how far we have fallen from God's original design and intention. There are all kinds of sites for fast and easy divorces, divorces for \$149, divorces without lawyers, low-cost fast divorces, no court divorces. It might surprise you to hear that's how it was in Jesus' day as well

One example will suffice. I have here my copy of the Mishnah. Among orthodox Jews this book is second only to their Hebrew Scriptures. This is the compilation of oral rabbinic teaching collected over centuries and written soon after the time of Christ.

Mishnah Gittin 9:10 states: "The School of Shammai say, 'A man should divorce his wife only because he has found grounds for it in unchastity since it is said, "Because he has found in her indecency in anything (Deuteronomy 24:1)."' And the School of Hillel say, 'Even if she spoiled the dish [some food], since it is said, "Because he has found in her indecency in anything.'"

Rabbi Akiba says, ‘Even if he found someone else prettier than she, since it is said, “And it shall be if she find no favor in his eyes (Deuteronomy 24:1).”’”

The whole debate hinged on three different interpretations of Deuteronomy 24:1.

Deuteronomy 24:1 “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her ...

One tradition, the Shammai School of rabbis which was more conservative, emphasized indecency or unchastity and permitted divorce only in cases of sexual immorality and unfaithfulness. Another tradition, the more liberal Hillel School, permitted divorce for any reason which comes out clearer in Matthew’s gospel when he adds the words, “for any cause.” And a third tradition picked up on the words “if she finds no favor in his eyes” to mean if he finds someone more attractive.

This was the mindset and hardheartedness Jesus was dealing with, so don’t be taken in even though the question seems very simple and straight forward, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife (Matthew adds, for any cause)?”

Behind all of this was a sinful excuse to pursue ones lust in any direction. They wanted sexual freedom to put off one wife quickly in the pursuit of another more to his liking. This liberal attitude obviously favored the men and put the women in a very precarious position of being thrown out with no means of support. The problem is as old as Moses and Malachi.

Mark 10:2-4, Hard Test.

The Pharisees are up to their usual tricks trying to set traps to catch Jesus so they can discredit Him and arrest Him for treason or blasphemy against the Law of Moses.

They think they are so clever in their traps. They come up with questions where Jesus is damned no matter how He answers, “Heads they win, tails Jesus loses.”

If Jesus says no then they will accuse Him of overthrowing the Law of Moses. If Jesus says yes then they will say He is no prophet of God and is just going along with the lusts of the flesh.

But Jesus is the master of catching people in their own traps. The benefit for us is this trap became the occasion Jesus used to give us His teaching on marriage and divorce. Jesus knew that He wanted to leave with us His authoritative teaching on marriage and divorce and set the record straight concerning the meaning of Moses’ permissiveness.

In true rabbinic fashion Jesus responded to their question with a question of His own. They answered straight from Deuteronomy 24:1, the verse that was the major point of controversy.

They wanted to know what was permissible, but Jesus told them what was commanded (James Edwards, *Mark*, p. 301). The Pharisees made their appeal back to Moses, Jesus said they didn’t go far enough. They needed to go back to the original blueprint, to God’s original purpose and design for marriage. God created marriage to be an exclusive and permanent bond.

Jesus expands their understanding of marriage as we saw last week and leaves them speechless. How can a written certificate of divorce dissolve the bond God has made?

This is the mystery of marriage revealed in the NT. Marriage on earth is a picture of the relationship that exists between Jesus and His bride the Church and that relationship is exclusive and permanent. Jesus' marriage is the reality and God calls us to live our marriages in sync with that reality.

This is why God hates divorce, divorce is a lie about the mystery of marriage. Jesus would never divorce His bride. Jesus never abuses her, He never abandons her, He's never harsh or critical or mean spirited to her. He never hits her or harms her or calls her names or demeans her. He doesn't even get annoyed and impatient with her. In fact in the face of her sin and adultery, Jesus loves her and dies for her.

Christian marriage is meant to be a picture of the gospel to the world, a picture of the love of Christ. This is why Christians above all others should hold marriage in highest regard and honor marriage and the marriage bed (Hebrews 13:4).

Mark 10:5-9, Hard Hearts.

Jesus explains divorce is a result of sin, of *hardheartedness*. What does that mean? Divorce is an accommodation to man's sin, it's a concession for the sake of preserving the sanctity of marriage and protecting the innocent partner in the face of sexual immorality or as Paul teaches in the face of abandonment by an unbeliever.

Jesus shows His utmost high regard for marriage by teaching that the bond can only be broken by the greatest of all causes, sexual unfaithfulness. And even then the Bible never commands divorce, but only permits it for reason of hardness of heart where there's no repentance.

Jesus came to conquer hardness of heart, Jesus came to change our hearts, Jesus came to show us the Law of Love, to love God, to love our neighbor, to love our enemies, to love our husbands and wives, to show compassion to those who need it most.

Jesus came to show what sacrificial love is like, servant love, love that gives and gives and gives some more, love that forgives and forgives again. Jesus came to give us the grace and the power to keep our vows and stay married, and not just to grin and bear it, but to joyfully embrace the sacred covenant it is.

Please keep in mind that the Bible merely permits divorce in limited circumstances; it never commands divorce. The first goal is repentance and forgiveness and reconciliation and restoration. That is God's path with us and our path with each other in all sin.

Mark 10:9 What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.

Mark 10:10-12, Hard Teaching on Divorce and Adultery.

Matthew 19:9-10 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." 10 The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry."

Jesus' teaching bothered the disciples. We get the sense the disciples have been taken in by the liberal mindset of their culture. If you can't get out of the marriage easily then it would be better

not to marry at all. They thought that God would approve of all the exceptional circumstances everyone was coming up with. They are surprised by the high standards Jesus says God has for marriage.

Hebrews 13:4 Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

The main point of Jesus' teaching here is to underscore the sacredness of marriage and the inviolability of the covenant bond. In God's design and in God's eyes the two become one flesh. Since this covenant bond is not broken in God's eyes, to divorce and remarry is still adultery.

If this teaching seems hard, consider the underlying implications. If this wasn't true, then Jesus could divorce His bride and that would be truly catastrophic for us and for the world. If God wasn't faithful there would be nothing solid in this world to ever trust. Human marriage reflects the character and nature of our covenant making and covenant keeping God.

Are we looking for ways out or are we seeking what God intends? Are we emphasizing what is permitted because of our sin or are we committing ourselves to what God intended? Will we take the easy road or the high road?

Illustration: When you are learning to fly, you don't focus on how to make a crash landing. When learning how to be a good soldier in battle, you don't focus on how to make a good retreat. That's like getting a bank loan and then asking right away what the conditions are for getting out of paying it back (James Edwards, *Mark*, p. 301).

Our questions in marriage should not be how can I get out of this since I am so unhappy, but rather what would God have me do, what does God desire for my marriage? Our questions should not be like the Pharisees trying to determine how they can get out of their commitments, they should be what does God intend marriage to be.

Application and Conclusion.

When Phama and I got married in 1980 I said to her that the back door of our marriage is locked and the key is thrown away. I specifically said divorce is not an option, come hell or high water this is it. We have been through some high water. We haven't been in hell, maybe purgatory a couple of times, but by God's grace and lots of prayer and talking and lots of repentance and forgiveness here we stand.

Guard against a hard heart. The danger of a hard heart is that it may stay that way and you will show yourself to not be a true follower of Christ.

Hebrews 3:12-19 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

But we must also guard against guilt, shame and condemnation. God's forgiveness is for those who sin. No one who humbly repents to God and appeals for forgiveness will be denied. God is merciful.

I Corinthians 6:9-11 Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

The good news for those who have divorced is that to all who repent and trust in Christ's blood for the forgiveness of their sins, are forgiven and there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

Acts 10:43 Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sin's through his name.

Ephesians 5:25-27 Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

A Blessing of Marriages:

Now may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Father from whom every family and all fatherhood in heaven and on earth derives its name bless and keep you.

May the Lord grant you grace and strength for all your days together.

May the Lord enable you to bridle your tongue, keep your heart pure, and deliver you from all temptation.

May the Lord grant you a sense of God-appointedness about the special purposes for which He brought just the two of you together.

May the Lord bless the fruit of your marriage and may you see your children and your children's children profess faith and walk in the truth.

May the Lord grant you health to grow old together and the courage to grow old gracefully.

Together may you love and serve the Lord all the days of your life to the honor and glory of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Holy Father, there are few issues more painful and hard to talk about. I plead with you for the grace of the Holy Spirit to be poured out in our hearts right now enabling us to hear you and your Word clearly, to come under the conviction of your Spirit and not the condemnation of the enemy of our souls and the enemy of our marriages. Father, grant us the grace to call out to you and to others when we need help, don't let Satan isolate us through pride or shame. Father, please by your power at work in our midst, make our marriages reflect you and your covenant relationship with your people. By your grace help us to keep our vows and so glorify you.