

## 56 Mark 10:1-12

# Marriage & Divorce

### Text

**Transition:** And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them.

**Crowds:** **2** And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” **3** He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” **4** They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” **5** And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. **6** But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ **7** ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, **8** and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. **9** What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

**Disciples:** **10** And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. **11** And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, **12** and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

### Introduction

And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them.

We transition from last weeks text to this weeks as Jesus moves geographically. He is headed for Jerusalem, toward his death. He is undaunted in this journey, but still he takes time to teach. It is through his work, people's intellectual grasp of that work, and their resting in it that will secure their salvation. It is through the Word that God intends to reach people. It is through the Word that Jesus intends to grow his people.

### The Trick Question

*2 And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”*

The Pharisees were trying to catch Jesus in a trap. There were two rival teachings on divorce at that time. One of them, the teaching of Shammai, stresses a fairly strict interpretation, allowing for divorce only in the case of infidelity. The teaching of Hillel, on the other hand, was fairly liberal, allowing for divorce for almost any reason.

The Pharisees had a preference, and most likely they sided with Hillel. However, what they really thought was not relevant. All they cared about was trapping Jesus. Knowing that this was a controversial issue, they raise the question knowing that whatever side Jesus actually fell on, there would be a number of people who would take the other side. They simply wanted to erode

Jesus' public support. They would have already taken him and put him to death if it was withing their power. But because they feared the people they could not act.

They previously tried to turn public opinion by attributing his power to demons. That didn't work so they are trying a different route. Surprisingly, the Pharisees and the majority of the people took the more liberal position allowing divorce for almost any reason. Perhaps they knew Jesus leaned toward the more conservative position and thus thought they could trap him with it.

## Christ's Response

### Sola Scriptura

*3 He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" 4 They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away."*

But notice how Jesus responds. Jesus does not side with Hillel or Shammai; he goes straight to scripture.

He avoids the controversy, not by dodging the issue like so many politicians, but by going to the right source. He is not content to simply state his position. He wants people to think through it. What did Moses say? Was it lawful? What did the law say? Come on gentlemen, think through this with me.

Deut 24:1-4 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, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, 2 and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, 4 then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance.

Jesus asks, "what did Moses command?" The Pharisees are unable to come up with a command. The best they can do is this legislation from Deuteronomy. France observes, "That passage does not specifically 'command', or even 'permit', divorce, but rather regulates (in v 4) the situation which results after a divorce has taken place." Thus the case for divorce is not as strong as some may think. You will look in vain for a command in scripture for divorce. There is no command. Divorce is only even mentioned a few dozen times - 28 by my count. Of these 28, 9 of them occur in the gospels in the confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees. So if we don't count this exchange, it occurs in 19 verses. Three of them are in the epistles where Paul says don't divorce. Three of them occur in Leviticus where the priests are told not to marry divorced women. It occurs once in Numbers saying that divorced women should keep any oaths or vows they make. It occurs 5 times in the prophets either about Israel or quoting one of the Levitical instances. Thus far we have seen no command nor even an allowance. There are only 7 more to consider. Four are found in Deuteronomy. Two of these say "he may not divorce her." And two of them are the verses that the Pharisees brought up. The remaining three verses are found in Matthew. One in reference to Joseph and Mary when he was contemplating issuing her a divorce. And two of them are from Jesus in Matthew 5:31-32. As it turns out, not only is there no

command, we cannot say for sure that it was even allowed except for these two verses and their parallels.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is not a very strong case. We often just assume that it is ok to get a divorce as if that were a no brainer. Permission is there, but it is pretty scant. We understand from Jesus that at least implicitly, Moses allowed for a man to write a certificate of divorce. Ok, so broadly speaking, it was legal. But the question now becomes, "Under what circumstances may a man write that certificate?"

## **A Concession to Sin**

*5 And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.*

So many of the laws were created merely because of sin. What happens if a man steals your donkey? What should happen if a man bears false testimony? What if what if what if? So many laws exist merely to deal with our sin. But we do not look to those laws to how we should live. To base your understanding of marriage on that is completely ignore what marriage was designed to be. It is like learning to be a gymnast by reading books on how to set compound fractures. No! That is what you do when things go horribly wrong. That has nothing to do with how, positively, to be a good gymnast.

It is like trying to be a good race-car driver by studying the evacuation procedures for when your car is on fire. Can you learn something by doing that? Yes. In fact you should be well aware of that just in case you are in a car fire. But that it not principally what makes a skilled driver. May we study this law on divorce and learn something? Yes. It is part of scripture and God has given it to us for a reason. But do not build an entire theology on it.

It was because of the hardness of your heart that he wrote you the commandment. It is because of your sin. Those of you who seek a divorce, the very act of it is a tacit admission of sin. There should be shame associated with sin. Here I must tread lightly, but confidently. So hear all that I have to say.

**The Current Situation:** Divorce is on the rise, and it has been on the rise for some time. It is now the exception rather than the rule that people will stay together. Because of this fact, almost every church in existence has divorced people in it. Additionally, divorce touches on some of the deepest seated emotions that we have. Very few things touch us as deeply and severely as divorce. These two facts combine in a terrible way. The existence of so many divorced people in addition to the deeply emotional and highly volatile nature of divorce makes pastors afraid to speak out on it. The most I typically hear is that it is generally not a good thing biblically. There is such a fear of addressing divorce that we have become very accepting of divorced people.

## **The Design of Marriage**

*6 But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 7 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, 8 and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."*

Jesus moves them back from Moses and the concession he made to the very beginning. At creation, God created them male and female. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother,

and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. Let's take that apart.

**Design:** He created them male and female. This was God's design. This was how it was intended to be. What positively should we know about marriage? God created them male and female, in his image he created them. Jointly, we reflect the image of God. If there was only a woman, then only a portion of God's image would be reflected. If there were only man, then only a portion of God's image could be seen. God created them in his image. There are masculine and feminine traits that reflect the image of God. He is so much more that any one creature can reflect. Man and woman, together, give a much great picture of what God's image is.

He created them male and female. Man was created first, and God said, it is not good for man to be alone. Did you hear that? It is not good for man to be alone. I know you may be thinking, "What about being single?" This is one time I am not going to qualify; you will just have to suffer through that one on your own. You just need to focus on what is being said here. It is not good for man to be alone. He created them to be together. He created them to exist together!

**Other Relationships:** What about other relationships. That wasn't the end of the story you know. God commanded them to be fruitful and multiply, and through that there would be other relationships formed. What about all these other relationships? What about friends and nephews and cousins and aunts? Let's just take some of the closest of relationships and look at them.

"Therefore" says Christ, "a man should leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife."

Should I not honor my father and mother? Yes, but your marriage is of higher priority than are your parents. Never are you told to leave your wife - never! But here we are told to leave our parents. We must not hold too closely to our parents. A man may not continue to hang on his mother's apron strings. A woman may not continue to seek her dad on everything. They need to let go. I am not saying that we do not honor, do not help, or do not ever seek advice from our parents. What I am saying is that they become secondary, and your wife and your husband become primary.

You leave them and hold fast to your wife.

**One flesh:** And, you become one flesh! Is that not an amazing description? How much closer can you get? You are one. You should act as one, think as one, exist as one. Each of you bringing strengths to the relationship. Each one shoring up where the other is lacking. Both of you playing the roles that God designed for you to play and in so doing create an amazing harmony. This is the harmony that brings such richness to music, this is the blending of colors that gives such depth and emphasis in art, this is the display of unity (one flesh) in diversity (two people) that reflects the Trinity. One man bring his bringing his God-reflecting attributes to the table, one woman, bringing her God reflecting attributes to the table, and the dynamic that the two together bring further reflecting the glorious image of the creator! That is what marriage was intended to be! Why this talk about divorce? One flesh! This is not two people under contract. The picture is of a single entity that not only should not, but cannot be separated! What hemorrhaging will occur when a being that is one is torn in two! Oh how horrible! That is what happens when something has gone drastically wrong! But that was not what marriage was intended to be!

Ladies & gentlemen, we need to reclaim God's view of marriage.