

MARK — Jesus Talks About Divorce

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Mark 10:1-12

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.

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

“What did Moses command you?” he replied.

They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”

“It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied. “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mk 10:1–12.

Jesus' Response

This region of Judea is where Herod Antipas ruled. Earlier in the story, John the Baptist critiqued Herod for divorcing the princess of Nabatea and marrying his brother Philip's wife. So the Pharisees, knowing this, decide to test Jesus using a question that cost him his cousin's life.

What did Moses command you? — Jesus

When Jesus is offered a hot button question issues he doesn't freak out. He typically responds by asking questions. "What does your authority figure say?"

They respond with an *interpretation* from the Torah:

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, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Dt 24:1–4.

This is certainly an issue today.

Hard Hearts

Mark brings up the issue of hard heartedness earlier in his gospel, and uses it to describe the human condition in their stubborn rebellion against God.

It is an expression of the heart where it is unyielding and unwilling to learn or understand anymore. “I’m unwilling to learn any more about you and care about you.”

It’s a scary place to be in.

When two people come together, there is a mountain of baggage that both people bring into relationships and as marriage progresses, the junk is unpacked. Ideally, it would be met with reconciliation and healing and softening of hearts. But most of the time, it seems to end in pride, bitterness, defensiveness, despising each other’s weaknesses and we become hard hearted.

Marriage can end up with the disposition, “I’m unwilling to learn anymore.”



The test of relationships is, will you soften your heart or harden your heart?
Will you grow in compassion and love or stubborn, defensive pride?

The longer we’re together, the longer we must become safe havens for each other. Marriage introduces you to yourself and requires a deep humility to prevent the hardness of heart.

And when the Pharisees test him, Jesus reveals that the possibility of divorce is made as a concession to the hardness of Israel's heart.

Covenant Bond

For some reason, Jesus viewed the law in Deuteronomy as not ideal. He reveals this by appealing to God's original design: In the beginning, there was created one woman and one man, singular, and they are to be in sacred, spiritual, sexual, faithful, loyal, loving covenantal union.

Marriage is the primary metaphor used to describe our relationship to God. And God wants us to see that. He doubles down on this significance by getting married to Israel at Mt. Sinai. (Exodus 19, 24).



Marriage is a much bigger deal than we think. And if God has defined it as such, let man not break apart what God has determined. Otherwise we will be disciples of the culture of Man rather than the culture of God.

It takes male and female in a covenant bond to image God's relationship to humanity. Paul in Ephesians uses Marriage as the foundation for understanding our relationship to God as well. BUT. This is not to elevate marriage over singleness. Both Jesus and Paul emphasize that if someone has the gift of singleness, they should receive it.

Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like

eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. **The one who can accept this should accept it.”**

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mat 19:11–12.

I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1 Cor 7:6–7.

Soften Your Heart Therefore

And so, in order to avoid hardening our hearts, we must accept that when we get married, the number one problem to deal with is not your spouse, but yourself. Treat marriage as if you're the biggest problem. And about receiving God's forgiveness and your spouse's forgiveness.

But if you can stay single, stay single. Marriage is challenging, dying to yourself work.

Treat marriage as if you're the biggest problem.

There is no shame in admitting brokenness in marriage, but in fact it is necessary and should be the safest place to admit brokenness.

The problem in the garden is that humans exalted themselves above God, in order to define for themselves what right and wrong is. We want to sit in judgment over God's

work.

But dear humans, don't fall into the trap of Genesis 3 and think that you are higher than God, and that you know better than him.

Concession & Accommodation

The truth is that divorce is permitted for the hardness of our hearts. And God permitted divorce. So what are the conditions in which divorce is permitted?

Let's begin in this passage.

Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mk 10:11–12.

He was entering a hotly debated issue on the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24.

Rabbi Hillel had a progressive school that said for any reason, a man can divorce his wife. Women had no legal recourse to prevent divorce. Divorce put women at a severe socio-economic disadvantage.

So contra Hillel, Jesus is guarding women and their socio-economic security.

It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his

wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mt 5:31–32.

But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1 Co 7:15–16.

- The Corinthian law announced that the departure of either party dissolves a marriage. Paul addresses the Corinthians in that context.

Divorce is not God's design. But God does make concession for it for certain reasons. But there are wrong reasons and Jesus defines divorce over the wrong reasons as adultery.

Editor's Note: Jesus' response to divorce in Matthew 5, 19, and Mark 10, as well as Paul's treatment in 1 Corinthians 7 and Ephesians 5 isn't exhaustive in their treatment on marriage and divorce. A third condition, abuse (against spouses or children), can be seen as grounds for divorce when meditating on the Torah and God's character. Exodus 22 (As well as Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) contains an abundance of laws that concern not

oppressing widows, orphans, and foreigners. Additionally, the picture of marriage given in Ephesians 5, and 1 Corinthians 6 & 7 looks like each husbands yielding their authority to their wives, and wives yielding authority to their husbands. When we see God's relationship (who is typified by the husband) interacting with Israel & also the church (who is typified by the wife), we do not see grounds for abuse in God's character. **So just because Jesus only mentions adultery as grounds for divorce, this doesn't logically conclude that he couldn't find another reason, such as abuse, as another condition for divorce. Please talk to a pastor or C-Group leader if you have concerns about this — we don't want this to go unaddressed.**

What Does the Gospel Have to Say?



What does it have to say about those who treated divorce flippantly and messed up? Jesus treats it as any other sin.

When humans divorced God and chose to define right and wrong for themselves, it brought shame and fear and death into the world.

Even when everything went wrong, God promises to send a rescuer through the woman who will be the salvation of man.

Divorce is not the “really bad unredeemable sin” for which you shouldn't go to church. It's not a sin that makes you a second class citizen. There is forgiveness and a plan of restoration.

The good news is that there is forgiveness for any marriage and any relationship. If both parties admit they are the biggest problem, the gospel is that the Holy Spirit will be

poured out and soften their hearts; soften your hearts, and begin to restore the relationship.

So whether you are in a troubled marriage, or have been divorced, the good news is that there is forgiveness, a plan for redemption, and a Spirit of peace that will soften hearts and turn them towards repentance.