

What Does Jesus Say about Marriage, Divorce, and Sexuality?
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Original: 6-9-24; 6-16-24

Text: Mark 10:1-12 (see also Matt. 5:31-32; 19:1-9; Luke 16:18)

Gospel of Mark: [Bibliography](#) or [Manuscripts and Greek Exegesis](#)

UBS 4th Edition Paragraph Topic: Teaching about Divorce

Central Idea of Message: God's desire for every marriage is that it be heterosexual, monogamous, and permanent, and that if a disruption does occur that forgiveness and reconciliation are enlisted in the mending and restoration of the relationship.

Introduction: Episode 50. At the end of chapter 9 Jesus was about six months from the crucifixion. Now, he has left Galilee for the last time and is only a few weeks from his death (cf. Robertson 1:348).

The Pharisees have been relentless in their pursuit of Jesus, trying to entrap him in his words at every opportunity so that they might justify their murderous intent, which their rival, the Sadducees, wanted too, along with the scribes.

It is in this hostile environment that Jesus teaches about marriage, divorce, and sexuality.

I. Pharisees Question Jesus about Divorce (vv. 1-2)

- A. Jesus relocates (v. 1)
 - 1. He had been in Capernaum (Mark 9:33)
 - 2. Now, Jesus went from there to the region of Judea, and even beyond the Jordan River [eastbound]
 - 3. Crowds gathered around him, and, as was customary for him to do, he taught them
- B. Pharisees question Jesus about divorce (v. 2)
 - 1. The Pharisees were the extremely strict Jewish party and might have been trying to embroil Jesus in the on-going debate between the two most influential schools of thought
 - a) Headed by two Jewish Rabbis, one named Hillel [liberal] and the other named Shammai [conservative]
 - b) These two Rabbis collided most notably on the issue of divorce, in that Hillel allowed divorce for almost every cause, but Shammai allowed it only for adultery (cf. Barclay

278; Burdick 1009; Dummelow 688; Grassmick 2:148; Lane 353; Robertson 1:349; Wessel 710)

- (1) Which of these schools of thought do you think was the most popular? Hillel, of course!
 - (2) Divorce was rampant among the Jews at the time of Jesus, so bad, in fact, commentator Hugh Peterson calls the divorce situation "deplorable" (Peterson 73)
 - (3) Sounds like modern-day America!
2. The questions from the Pharisees were to test Jesus, likely in an attempt to trap him in something he might say, for their motivation was obviously evil
 - a) Something the Pharisees could put him on trial for by contradicting the Law or upsetting Herod Antipas, who had divorced his wife to marry his sister-in-law, Herodias, the pointing out of which cost John the Baptist his head (Mark 6:14-29)
 - b) Something unorthodox in conflict with Moses which the crowds would be upset about and thus leave him or even stone him
 - c) **Teaching or preaching on marriage, divorce, remarriage, and sexuality can still get a man in trouble!**
 3. The question from the Pharisees was whether or not it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife
 - a) **Just because something is lawful doesn't mean God approves of it [e.g. abortion, same-sex marriage]**
 - b) Please note that the Pharisees did not ask whether or not it was lawful for a wife to divorce her husband, since Jewish law did not allow such, but Roman law did!
 - c) Their perspective was almost always lopsided!

II. **Jesus Answers the Question about Divorce by Citing Creation to Teach God's Design Regarding Marriage and Human Sexuality (vv. 3-9)**

- A. Jesus answers the Pharisees with a question: "What did Moses command you?" (v. 3)
 1. The Pharisees were intimately familiar with what Moses had written in the Law
 - a) Lev. 21:7, 14; 22:13

- b) Num. 30:9
 - c) Deut. 22:19, 29
 - d) **Divorce for adultery was not allowed in the Old Testament because the penalty for adultery was death, not divorce (Lev. 20:10)**
 - e) In a country where the penalty for adultery is no longer death, divorce has become a less severe, but still terribly traumatic option for many
- 2. Jesus was quite familiar with the Law of Moses!
 - 3. **Perhaps Jesus' question is not so the Pharisees could quote Moses, but to find out what these Pharisees thought Moses meant, since plenty of them knew what Scripture said, they just didn't know what it meant**
 - 4. And this description fit the Pharisees!
- B. The answer of the Pharisees to Jesus (v. 4)
- 1. Moses *permitted* divorce [note how the Pharisees did not reuse the word *commanded*]
 - 2. Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and send his wife away (cf. Deut. 24:1-4; Matt. 5:31)
 - 3. "Moses neither commanded nor forbade divorce, but commanded that, if it took place, it must be done in a certain way and be irrevocable" (Plummer 232)
 - a) It had to be done in writing
 - b) The certificate had to be put in the wife's hand
 - c) The man could never remarry her
- C. Jesus' response (vv. 5-9)
- 1. "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment" (v. 5)
 - a) Jesus takes an infinitely higher position than either Hillel or Shammai
 - b) God allowed Moses to issue this declaration strictly because of hard-heartedness!
 - c) "Your" hardness of heart is plural, indicating the collective stubborn condition of many of the men at the time of Moses
 - d) **This concession regarding divorce was because husbands were merciless and unforgiving, refusing to respond to God's promptings but, instead, acting with utter callousness due to their lack of spirituality and refusal to be reconciled**

- (1) These regulations were given to provide protection for women in a male-dominated society so the spurned wife could remarry legally and move on with life
 - (a) Just as Moses' "eye for eye" and "tooth for tooth" statement limited atrocious over-retaliation, Deut. 24:1 limited the meanness of the husband in the case of divorce (cf. Cooper 164)
 - (b) One commentator even suggests that this concession for a man to divorce his wife may have saved her from being killed (cf. Henry 5:516)
- (2) **Something can be legal but still not be right or in accord with God's divine purpose, so Deut. 24:1 tolerated divorce but neither authorized nor sanctioned it (cf. Lane 355)**
 - (a) A distinction needs to be made between that which sets forth the absolute will of God and those provisions which take into account mankind's sinfulness and are designed to limit and control the consequences of this sinfulness
 - (b) The error of the Rabbis' interpretation of Moses' decree was that they lost sight of this distinction and came to think that God allowed divorce in the sense that it had his approval and didn't come under his judgment
 - (c) God's mercy is designed to limit the consequences of mankind's sin and must not be interpreted as divine approval for sinning
- (3) **When our sinfulness traps us into a position where all choices open to us are evil, we must choose the least evil and ask God's forgiveness, but we must never pretend that evil is good or authorized by God**
 - e) God's original ideal has always been one man and one woman for life, and mankind's

stubbornness kept him from accepting this fact, because sin has twisted and distorted human thinking even on this most intimate of relationships

2. "But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female" (v. 6)
 - a) **Citing Gen. 1:27, Jesus not only credits God with creating males and females, but also urges his listeners to look back at creation to get the answers to their questions on marriage, divorce, and sexuality**
 - (1) The special words used for male [arsen] [ἄρσῆν] and female [thelus] [θηλυς] mean "male of any living creature" or "female of any living creature"
 - (2) By God's intentional design, throughout all living creatures, there are *only two* sexes
 - b) **God's creative order for human beings is binary [only two sexes]!**
 - (1) **Binary:** the view of gender whereby people are categorized exclusively as either male or female, commonly basing gender identity upon one's biological sex at birth
 - (2) **Non-Binary:** someone whose gender identity cannot be described as exclusively male or female and may be used as an umbrella term encompassing many gender identities, including transgenderism
 - (3) **The Bible knows *nothing* of a non-binary category for humans or other living creatures**
 - c) **The biblical identification as *male* and *female* draws a clear distinction between boys and girls as purposely designed such by God himself, thus *disallowing* any non-binary or *transgender* definition**
 - d) I reiterate: "But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female"
3. "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother" (v. 7)

- a) Jesus cited Gen. 2:24 where the words used in this context refer to God making the woman, Eve, out of the rib of Adam
 - b) **The concepts of both heterosexuality and monogamy being God's ideal and norm of one woman for one man are powerfully expressed in God's act of creating Eve (Gen. 2:22)**
 - c) **Genesis is an extremely important book, because it is foundational for so much which follows!**
4. "And the two shall become one flesh; consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh (v. 8)
- a) **"Leaving father and mother and cleaving to his wife" means establishing an intimate relationship with one wife which supercedes the family relationship the boy/man has had with his mother and father**
 - b) **The husband's relationship with his wife becomes the single most important *human* relationship he has, even *ahead* of the children that might be born**
 - (1) **"In the act of copulation a man and a woman can approach closest to the uniquely divine act of creation" (Mills)**
 - (2) **"One flesh" means functioning as a *single unit* where each is interdependent upon the other, complementing each other, thus completing in the newly formed single unit what the other lacks [sperm cells, egg cells, etc.]**
 - (3) **In order for marriage to be successful, neither husband nor wife can function any longer as an independent, singular person, but must operate as a new single unit**
 - (4) **Human selfishness, by husband, wife, or both, is almost always at the root of every divorce**
 - (5) **Maintaining pre-marital independence [singularity] into marriage seriously undermines the two becoming one flesh and is a root cause for many divorces**

- (6) The reference to the two becoming one flesh thus indicates an *interdependence* on each other, an *intimate* dependence on each other, and the possibility of *immaculate* [morally unstained] procreation [producing babies]
- (7) Jesus purposely limited the number of persons in the sexual union to two and further limited the biological sex of the persons in the sexual union to male and female, thereby establishing *heterosexuality* as the biological and physiological sexual norm for *all* living creatures, thus making *homosexuality* not only abnormal, but also an abomination (see Lev. 18:22; 1 Kings 14:24)
- (a) This stands true for all humans
 - (b) This stands true for all animals
- (8) By citing Gen. 2:24, Jesus not only endorsed and upheld the Old Testament foundational teaching which limits the marital/sexual relationship to a man and a woman, but also to a *pair* alone, meaning a *couple* and not a "throuple" or more [polyamory: multiple lovers]
- (9) At this point, I think it would be very informative to relate to you some significant *steps* in the sexual and moral revolution which have transpired over the last sixty-years, and I am getting these insights from Albert Mohler, President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, who does a daily podcast called [The Briefing](#), namely, from the [March 13, 2024 Briefing monologue](#)
- (a) Normalization of premarital sex
 - (b) Normalization of extramarital sex
 - (c) Adultery became an "affair"
 - (d) The system of sexual morality in America broke
 - (e) Divorce laws weakened marriage

- (f) **Marriage was redefined to include same-sex unions**
 - (g) **Homosexual behavior was promoted as normal**
 - (h) **Homosexuality was decriminalized**
 - (i) **LGBTQIA2+ "rights" are championed**
 - (j) **Homosexual marriage was decriminalized**
 - (k) **Undo the gender binary framework of only two categories [male and female] to include transgenderism**
 - (l) **Expand the marriage relationship from monogamous to polyamorous [multiple non-monogamous lovers/partners, i.e. Swingers]**
 - (m) **Discard marriage and the concept of the *Nuclear Family* altogether [a group of people who are united by ties of parenthood and partnership consisting of one male dad and one female mom and their socially recognized children]**
- (10) The result has been nothing short of an immoral mess in America where there seems to be no limit to the justification and legalization of almost anything having to do with adult consensual sex
- (11) America has become a country whose laws and practices are no longer governed by God or even by common sense morality, but rather by sexual ideations and urges
5. "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (v. 9)
- a) **God's ideal for marriage has always been one man and one woman united together for life and is not to be disrupted: monogamous, heterosexual, and permanent as a man and a woman discipline themselves to live together for life - and it does take self-discipline!**
 - b) Some Old Testament characters had multiple wives [Jacob, David, Solomon], and even concubines [Jacob and Solomon]

- (1) **Concubines were monogamous sex-partners who were usually treated as a wife in a harem and even bore children**
- (2) **Bible references to polygamy [multiple wives] and concubinage are *describing* facts and flaws, not *prescribing* to go and do likewise**
- c) God sanctions a marriage and views the man and the woman as united for life such that even a man-made certificate of divorce does not dissolve the union in the eyes of God, only death does, which is one reason the punishment for adultery in the Old Testament was death by stoning, thus freeing the innocent party to remarry (cf. Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22)
- d) By New Testament times, death by stoning for adulterers was rarely if ever enforced, which may explain why Jesus provided an *exception clause* for remarriage in the case of adultery (Matt. 5:31-32), to be explored more thoroughly when we get to v. 12 in this passage
- e) **Nevertheless, God's will on marriage, divorce, remarriage, and human sexuality has never been repealed and never will be, for the ideal expressed in Genesis remains the gold standard**

III. **Jesus Further Explains His Teaching on Marriage and Divorce Privately to the Disciples (vv. 10-12)**

- A. Once inside the house, the disciples began questioning Jesus about what he had just said to the Pharisees (v. 10)
 - 1. People in the time of Jesus struggled with divorce just as we do today, although it likely was not as rampant
 - 2. According to divorce.com
 - a) **The United States has the sixth highest divorce rate in the world**
 - b) **Marriage and divorce rates dropped from 2009 to 2019 [fewer people getting married means fewer divorces, they're just living together]**
 - c) **Women started 69 percent of all divorces**

- d) **Second and third marriages have a higher divorce rate: 60 percent of second and 73 percent of third marriages end in divorce**
- e) **Couples going through their first divorce are around the age of 30**
- f) **Married couples between the ages of 20 to 25 are 60 percent likely to get a divorce**
- g) **The military divorce rate is 3 percent on average; in 2019 alone, 30,608 military marriages ended in divorce**
- h) **The divorce rate in America in 2021 was estimated to be around 48 percent; one marriage ends every 36 seconds**
- i) **Oklahoma is second only to Nevada with the highest divorce rate in the U.S., Massachusetts was the lowest, as of 2021**
- 3. **One stat that I heard on the radio recently from a Christian divorce attorney is that 33 percent of Christian marriages end in divorce**
 - a) **Using this percentage, the marriage has a 67 percent chance of lasting if both husband and wife are Christians**
 - b) **If one or neither is a Christian, it is basically a coin toss**
- B. **"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her" (v. 11)**
 - 1. **Jesus pointed out that some men already had eyes full of adultery**
 - a) **Some husbands were divorcing their wives for the express purpose of immediately replacing her with someone else who had caught their attention**
 - b) **Adultery is a strong word used by Jesus and is, of course, one of the "thou shalt nots" included in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:14)**
 - 2. **While Jesus does say that adultery is committed on the occasion of the next marriage, the present tense verb does not support understanding the new marriage as in a state of continual adultery (cf. Decker 45)**
 - 3. **Since Jesus says that remarriage after divorce results in at least one adulterous act, the divorce clearly *did not* dissolve the marriage in**

God's eyes, whereas the new marriage consummated by adultery apparently did (cf. Robertson 1:349)

- C. "And if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery" (v. 12)
1. Roman law allowed a wife to divorce her husband
 2. Some wives were divorcing their husbands for the express purpose of immediately replacing him with someone else who had caught their attention
 3. Action such as this amounted to desertion of the husband by the wife
 4. **Jesus said that in these circumstances the one initiating the divorce, the deserter, also initiates the adultery**
 5. However, in some cases, the one initiating the divorce did so because of his or her unfaithful spouse
 6. **Matthew records what is known as the exception clause which Jesus taught, allowing divorce in the case of unchastity [porneia, immorality, adultery] alone, thus suggesting that any other reason was causeless (Matt. 5:32; 19:9)**
 - a) Divorce is allowed in cases of impenitent adultery [adulterer is not repentant]
 - b) Divorce also appears to be allowed by 1 Cor. 7:15 if the unbelieving spouse leaves, as Paul says let her or him leave
 - (1) First, it is best not to enter into unequal alliances to begin with
 - (2) Do not be unequally yoked (2 Cor. 6:14-15)
 - (3) But if the unbelieving spouse simply will not put forth the effort to make the marriage last, so that one leaves, let her or him go
 - (a) In such a case of the unbelieving spouse leaving, the believing spouse is not under obligation to compromise her or his spiritual convictions or morals just to keep the unbelieving spouse happy
 - (b) This is a case of desertion, of abandonment
 - (4) The believer can, with the backing of the Bible, let the marriage dissolve

- peaceably at the initiation of the unbelieving spouse
- (5) The desertion itself by a professing believer calls into question, at the very least, the authenticity of her or his commitment to Christ
 - (6) God has called people to peace in marriage: perfect tense, so this continues to be his call!
 - (a) Christianity constrains us to behave peaceably in all facets of life
 - (b) Strive to keep domestic peace in marriage
 - (c) If you are the source of quarreling, stop it!
 - (d) There must be harmony in marriage
 - (e) God's ideal is peace in the household
 - (7) Remarriage also appears to be sanctioned by Scripture, but the believer must marry "only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39)

Conclusion: Principles.

(1) **God's desire for every marriage is that it be heterosexual, monogamous, and permanent, and that if a disruption does occur that forgiveness and reconciliation are enlisted in the mending and restoration of the relationship.**

(2) **"Marriage is not a matter of man's temporary convenience or pleasure, but of God's holy purpose"; it's not a "money-back-if-not-satisfied purchase" (Luccock 796).**

(3) **For marriage to be successful, it must be entered into with an element of finality and permanence wherein "till death do us part" is taken so seriously that it effectively closes the exit door by invoking the loyalty and dedication necessary to endure and thrive.**

(4) **While the math may not look right, God's arithmetic on marriage is that $1 + 1 = 1$ (cf. Luccock 797)!**

(5) **Unfortunately, mending and restoration are not always possible, because one, or both parties, involved refuses to forgive, reconcile, and restore. In cases such as these, some are left either to remain a divorced man or woman and not remarry or move on in life and marry another whom he or she believes to be highly compatible.**

(6) What I have sought to do is uphold the biblical *ideal*. This is what Jesus did by citing the creation account in response to the Pharisees' question about divorce. You should expect nothing less from me and accept nothing less from anybody else. Yet, we can all agree that life is often messy, so marriage can be as well.

(7) We must always aim for the biblical ideal and teach this to our children and grand-children. Never enter into a marriage with the thought of divorce as an option in the back of your mind! Never! Do your part to make the marriage work!

(8) If your spouse abandons you, refuses reconciliation and restoration, and files for divorce, there is nothing you can do to stop her or him. Maintain your moral purity! Maintain your Christian commitment!

(9) In cases such as abandonment and divorce initiated by the deserter, who knows, finding someone with your same Christian values might lead to a wedding and to the monogamous, heterosexual, permanent marital relationship you and God wanted all along.