

Mark 10:1-12

¹ Then He arose from there and came to the region of Judea by the other side of the Jordan. And multitudes gathered to Him again, and as He was accustomed, He taught them again. ² The Pharisees came and asked Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce *his* wife?" testing Him. ³ And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" ⁴ They said, "Moses permitted *a man* to write a certificate of divorce, and to dismiss *her*." ⁵ And Jesus answered and said to them, "Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. ⁶ But from the beginning of the creation, God '*made them male and female.*' ⁷ '*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,* ⁸ *and the two shall become one flesh*'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." ¹⁰ In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same *matter*. ¹¹ So He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. ¹² And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

Remember where we are in our text. The Pharisees are trying to put Christ in a bind by asking them a question. But Christ is taking them to school again on what the Bible has to say. They are asking Christ about divorce. Christ is telling them about God.

Now, after Christ served notice to the Jewish leaders, Christ's disciples discuss the matter more.

¹⁰ **In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same *matter*. ¹¹ So He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. ¹² And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."**

Notice carefully what Christ says here.

"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her.

The man is committing adultery against His wife. This is something new. This is not something you would learn in a Jewish household. In the Jewish mindset, adultery was always a sin against another man. If a man were to sleep with another man's wife, the sin was not seen as being against the woman. The sin was against the man. They would have thought it impossible to commit adultery against a woman.

But that is exactly what Jesus is saying here. Jesus assigns a value and importance to women previously unknown. He is essentially saying the sin against her is a big deal, even if no other man is involved. God regards your mistreatment of her as something serious, since she, too, is precious to God. It matters that she is being violated by this divorce and remarriage.

The effect of this would have been dramatic to the listeners. And it helps us understand what comes next in the story. It helps us understand why the disciples say what they say.

We see from the Pharisees question and their mentality that they were only concerned about the world of men. They were only concerned about how the divorce rules **affected them**. They were only concerned about what they, as men, were allowed to do.

Jesus, however, concerns Himself with the effect this will have upon **women** who God loves. So he adds this other perspective, this other element. If you divorce your wife, you are sinning against **HER**. This is not something they would have wanted to hear. It would have been difficult to believe Christ was even saying it. But say it **HE did**.

So, for all of you women this morning, take comfort in this love that God has for you, even when it might seem that you live in a man's world.

It is also important to note that these verses do not answer the question about a man adding a second wife and not divorcing the first. Scholars are vehement on both sides of that debate, but that is not what our passage is addressing.

What we see here is that **divorce** that results in **remarriage** creates a situation of adultery.

Again, this is not something the Pharisees or the disciples would have expected. They probably didn't think divorcing a wife they didn't like was all that big of a deal. They would probably feel justified for divorcing their wives if their wives didn't treat them the way they felt they should have. They would not have guessed that divorce, by its very nature, created a sinful condition before God. But Jesus is making it clear and He is not backing down.

So then, is Jesus saying that there are no provisions for divorce? There are many who say that is true. John Piper is one. And he gives some very good arguments. But I think he is wrong.

The way this whole topic makes the most sense to me is that Jesus, in Mark, is referring to marriages in the kingdom, marriages between believers in Christ. It makes perfect sense that believers, who have the burial, death and resurrection in common, should be able to love each other in Christ and work out all their differences. They have the church to help them referee their differences and to find ways to live together peacefully. And they have the other gifts in the church to appeal to for having their needs met.

So then, what about other arrangements? What about marriages that were entered into outside the bonds of Christian commitment? I think when we apply the assumption that I just mentioned, what Paul has to say fits perfectly. If we don't apply that assumption, it is more difficult to fit the pieces together.

1 Corinthians 7:1-16

¹ **Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: *It is good for a man not to touch a woman.* ² Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.**

Before we go further it is vital we get what is said in the first two verses. There are only two biblical positions regarding sexuality. There is complete abstinence from physical sexual intimacy, and there is marriage.

There are two kind of light switches at our house. There is a dimmer switch in our dining room. With that switch you can turn the light on very low and then keep turning it up until it is as light as can be. That is how our culture deals with sexual intimacy. The other switches in our house are on/off switches. There are only two positions, fully on or fully off. That is how God sees sexual intimacy. We do well to adjust accordingly in the guidance we give to young people or single people.

The church has accepted a third option over the years that we have gotten from our culture. We call it dating, among other things. And with it we have **expected** and **allowed** various degrees of sexual intimacy. And then we are shocked at the heartbreak it creates when it goes badly. We need to understand and believe and apply God's word. There is marriage. Or there is abstinence.

Let's read on.

³ **Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. ⁴ The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*. ⁵ Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.**

Remember when Christ said in our Mark text, "For this reason?" Well here you have it again said differently by Paul. It is for this reason, for sexual intimacy, that men and women come together in marriage. And since marriage is **for this reason, to intentionally withhold** this reason, this activity, is a violation of the marriage. It is not right to deny each other the benefits of the reason for the marriage.

Now it is clear in this text that there are sometimes reasons that married people will both agree to put off this intimacy for a higher priority. And every married couple works that out their own way.

But there is little benefit in married couples being surprised that their partners are normally interested in this activity. While that desire can easily be construed as a **selfish desire** and can be placed in a **negative light, God Himself** doesn't seem to do so. It is pretty much expected that this is something that married

people do and they got married to do so. And God wants them to have the opportunity and availability to do so. And if **He** is good with that arrangement, we would be wise to not be too critical of it.

Now timing for **when** that activity might happen.... That every couple needs to work out their own way.

Again, if you ever get the idea that God is not good and is withholding good stuff from His children, and the devil is the one that offers all the good stuff, just think about this. God provided marriage for us. What a wonderful gift it is. And it is from His hand to us.

⁶ But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. ⁷ For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. ⁸ But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; ⁹ but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*.

Alright. So Paul says that it is good to not get married. And that is **not because** marriage is not a **good** thing. But marriage presents some limitations and demands on a person's time. (All of us who are married would probably all agree that is a massive understatement.) But if passion is going to be a distracting element to a person's life, then it is better to take God's provision for that. And that is ok. It is not a second class decision. God created your desire and he created the relationship to fulfill that desire. Both are good.

Now next Paul gets to the provisions for handling those relationships. And I think we will immediately spot something Paul rarely does.

¹⁰ Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from *her* husband. ¹¹ But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to *her* husband. And a husband is not to divorce *his* wife.

Now Paul says, **yet not I but the Lord**. He is essentially saying that this is coming directly from the Lord. I think Paul is saying, this is ground that Christ has already covered. Christ addressed this situation. And we know that He covered it in Mark 10. We also see it in Matthew.

Matthew 5:31-32

³¹ "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' ³² But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

Now Paul says in I Corinthians:

A wife is not to depart from *her* husband. ¹¹ But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to *her* husband. And a husband is not to divorce *his* wife.

Paul is restating what Christ taught. And in context this addresses believers who are married. The rule for married believers- no divorce, period. If it gets so bad that a woman must get away from her husband, she should separate. But that does not give her the right to divorce and remarry.

We need to keep some things in mind here. Both parties, if believers, would be submissive to the leadership of the Word and the church. So if there is a problem like this, the elders would be working with both parties to reconcile. In this way there is hope that the situation could change. There is hope for the parties to heal. And there is a system of accountability that avoids any victimhood.

So there is no reason for believers to divorce. And it is not allowed.

Also notice the difference in advice to men and to women. A woman is permitted to separate with the assumption that the separation is necessary to resolve differences or to remain safe. But she is not permitted to remarry.

To the man it is simply stated that he is not permitted to divorce. There is nothing said about marrying someone else. There may be several reasons for that. One might be that he is not forbidden to marry two women, where a woman would be prohibited from marrying anyone else.

¹² But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. ¹³ And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.

Who are the rest? It is very clear from the context that the rest are those who are in mixed marriages. One person is a believer. The other is not.

Notice that Paul says that I, not the Lord, say this. How are we supposed to understand this? Is he saying, this is just his human opinion and everyone is free to ignore it? I don't think so. It would be odd to even include such a thing in scripture. It would be confusing.

It seems more likely and fitting that this advice from Paul is every bit as much God's Word as what Christ taught. But Christ was addressing those people who were considering the Kingdom of God. Paul is addressing the mix of what happens in real life in the church.

Now, how do you determine if a person believes or does not believe? That is what gets very hard in our society. Because very often when couples split one or both of the parties change churches or leave the church. In that situation, how do you get the confidence that both parties are believers? Profession of faith is one thing. But that profession is always tested by a willingness to submit to scripture. When there is no way to test that, it becomes extremely difficult to know if the party is a believer.

This teaching by Paul is best handled when the couple that is having difficulty dealing with their differences remains under the supervision and help of the

church. Only then can any certain determination be made of where both parties stand. As soon as parties go their own way, there won't be any confidence that the determination of a person's spiritual status will be accurate. And, in essence, it will ensure that more divorces take place than are actually allowed.

So, one of the most important determinations when resolving marriage problems is, are both parties believers and hence, submissive to the will of God? That one fact makes a huge difference in what we advise. We simply can't give advice until that question is resolved.

Now look at the determining factor for what to do in a mixed marriage. Is the unbelieving partner willing to live with the believer? There is no question asked about how fulfilling this relationship is. There is nothing mentioned about how well each party's needs are met. The only consideration brought forward is, will the unbelieving party remain in the marriage? Are they willing?

Even in this situation we cannot get the idea that a marriage that is **not between believers** does **not need to be honored**. Paul shows us that even **that marriage** matters. It should not be ended due to a preference or convenience. It should be respected and honored.

But we need to also keep in mind that it will be no small thing being married to a believer. That believer is going to be marching to a different drummer. Believing in Christ may actually make the believer a better spouse, but that will be hard for the person who must live with this changed spouse. This believing spouse is now going to serve the Lord. They will read God's word and go by it. They will pray to God. They will speak the truth. The implications may be very difficult for the unbelieving spouse. So, if the unbelieving spouse **remains willing** to stay married, this might be a good sign of their openness to the gospel.

So, why honor this marriage? Why stick to this marriage?

¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. ¹⁵ But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. ¹⁶ For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save *your* husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save *your* wife?

Verse 14 is a tough one. We know that it cannot mean that if an unbelieving husband remains married to a believing wife that the husband will be saved for eternity without ever having faith in Jesus Christ himself. So it can't mean that. So then what does it mean?

I've read a lot of hokey explanations that require way too much work to be believed. First we have to understand that sanctified just means set apart. It does not have to mean set apart for eternal salvation. There is something that is set apart about this relationship that is not true of two unbelievers living

together. The thing that is set apart may be the opportunity for Godly influence. Think about this. The man married to a Christian wife is going to have a heavenly influence in his home every day. And every child is going to experience that. There is something special about that, something sanctifying about that. So there is a good chance that the believing spouse is going to have an eternal effect. But, what if they don't? What if the spouse says, I have had enough of you. I want rid of you and your influence?

¹⁵ **But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.**

This is the only place where divorce is permissible other than because of sexual immorality. It is permissible in mixed marriages when the unbelieving party does not want to remain married.

Christians must be very careful in initiating divorce proceedings. As long as there is any hope for reconciliation, as long as there is no evidence that reconciliation **cannot** or **should not** happen, we should not be the party that initiates those proceedings. The only time we should is when the divorce is already complete, reconciliation would be impossible, but the paperwork hasn't been done.

It is interesting that Paul ends this instruction about departing with the words, **but God has called us to peace.** We are to have peace in this situation. This is not a fight we need to fight. We can accept our place and move on. We don't need to continue in enmity against an unbeliever who does not want to live with us.

Along with this I think it conveys more of Paul's attitude toward marriage.

Marriage is not to be worshipped. It isn't more than it is. It is a way for humans to live together in physical intimacy. And in it, it represents Christ and the church in a way no other relationships represent. But it is not heavenly. There will be no marriage in heaven. The best it will be will be here on earth is an aid for us and others as we pursue a life of fellowship with God and His people. And that is as peaceful as it gets.

Even in all of this, we see that marriage is a very big deal. It isn't eternal. It isn't spiritual although it is spiritually recognized. But it is a big deal. It is the only way men and women are intended to be joined together. When we look around us we see that our world spits at God every day. Our culture thinks what God has made is archaic, restrictive, old fashioned. And God still says it is absolutely required if one wants to enjoy this communion he created in a way that will please Him.

Now, let's see how the disciples respond to this teaching back in Matthew.

Matthew 19:10-12

¹⁰ His disciples said to Him, "If such is the case of the man with *his* wife, it is better not to marry." ¹¹ But He said to them, "All cannot accept this saying, but only *those* to whom it has been given: ¹² For there are eunuchs who were born thus from *their* mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept *it*, let him accept *it*."

Clearly the disciples grasped that Christ was changing the perspective. He was taking away a man's arbitrary right to trash something that is about God. He is demanding that women's interests are protected, even at a man's expense. He is making marriage about serving God over pleasing one's self.

And they clearly don't like it. They are probably all imagining living with difficult women without having any way to threaten them into conformity, having no recourse.

And they are concluding, I am not sure it is real smart to enter into marriage under the conditions you describe.

Notice that Jesus doesn't allay their fears. He doesn't say, no guys, you are misunderstanding what I am saying. No. He responds completely differently. He basically starts talking about their options.

The word for Accept in the phrase "**not all can accept this teaching**" means to make space for something. Not everyone is going to be able to wrap their mind around this idea that marriage is permanent. Not everyone will embrace God's idea of marriage. That will take a work of God on someone's heart.

I read a bunch of commentaries and my conclusion is that everyone is **guessing** about how the role of Eunuchs fit in here. I wonder if it might have been tongue in cheek. The disciples may have been commenting like men often do about the difficulties of living with women if we must stay committed to the same one indefinitely. So Jesus lays out the other alternatives. Well guys, if you don't like marriage there are several forms of Eunuchs available.

MacArther says that Jesus is laying out the only three categories where there can be **successful singleness**. He thinks the third is **voluntary singleness**, not a literal eunuch. And it is something chosen to fulfill the kingdom's work.

I really doubt that the disciples liked the eunuch option any better than being committed to one woman for life, no matter what. But those are their only choices. They can accept the commitment of marriage for life, or they can accept the option of singleness. But there are no other options.

We see from all of our study that Christ is very serious about marriage. And we better be to. Much of what Jesus addresses is how not to violate it. We learn in the epistles how we are actually to carry out these relationships, how men are to

love their wives and wives are to respect their husbands. We have been talking about the contract. While we do, we can't forget about the relationship. In studying for this sermon I ran across this story. I would like to end with it. **Some years ago I heard the story of an elderly minister who had been married for fifty years. One morning at breakfast his wife slumped over the table, unconscious. By the time her husband got her to the hospital she was dead. After the funeral he said to his sons, "This is a good day, a wonderful day" When they asked what he meant, he explained, "Well, I know she is with the Lord now. And I am glad she went first. That's the way I wanted it to be, because I didn't want her to have the grief of burying me and of having to live alone."** Some years later that minister was asked to speak at a feminist meeting on the subject of marriage. He recounted his wife's death and his gratitude that she had died first. "Listen," he told them, "anybody who knows the meaning of true love always wants the other person to go first, because they don't want them to endure the pain and the sorrow and the anxiety and loneliness of burying the one they've loved. I daresay that the modern romantic relationships that try to pass for love are a far cry from that kind of feeling and that kind of reality." He was right.

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Matthew 16-23.

Marriage was God's idea. It is God's creation. He is in charge of it. And he will eventually end its existence. In the meantime, those who are married are to view it as a lifetime commitment. We cannot allow our culture to change our expectations of marriage or our commitment to it. Those who are not committed to a marriage relationship are to refrain from any degrees of sexual intimacy. Do we treat marriage with the commitment it deserves? Do we allow **God's** thoughts to change **our thoughts**? And will we be obedient to God in that relationship? It provides us with the **opportunity to love better** every single day. It provides us the opportunity to represent either Christ or the church every day. Is that how we regard it? **It**, like **all of life**, is all about God.