

# Male and Female

Following Jesus to the Cross: Part 10  
Mark 10:1-12 (Mt.19:1-12, Lk.16:18) 1/5/2020

When asked about divorce, Jesus' first response was to point out maleness and femaleness. This message will help you see how the characteristics of the sexes combine to create a whole greater than the sum of the parts.

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**Mark 10:1** Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. **2** Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them. **2** Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" **3** "What did Moses command you?" he replied. **4** They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." **5** "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. **6** "But at the beginning of creation God `made them male and female'. **7** `For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, **8** and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. **9** Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." **10** When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. **11** He answered, "Anyone

**who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. 12 And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."**

## Introduction

### The Importance of Marriage

I don't know if it's possible to overstate how much damage the human race has done to itself by rejecting God's design for marriage. The marriage relationship is such a fundamental building block of society that if you weaken marriage, you undermine and destabilize the entire human race. What happens if you build a building and 80% of the bricks lose their structural integrity? And half of them crumble to pieces. That's what's happening in our culture. You look at inner cities, where over 80% of black children are born to unmarried parents. And you can just watch the crime and poverty and filth and gangs and drugs and chaos in those neighborhoods—the whole society just unravels. So often pundits and politicians want to blame poverty. But if you look at low income homes where the family is intact, you don't see these problems. It's not that crime is caused by poverty; it's that both crime and poverty are caused by fatherlessness.

All that to say, your marriage doesn't just affect your household; it's part of God's work in the whole human race. Marriage is the only human institution mentioned in the creation account. It's the only one that exists before the fall. It's a fundamental part of God's design for humanity, and so each new wedding is another chapter in the unfolding story of creation. And each divorce is another chapter in the unravelling of creation caused by the fall.

### The Judean/Perean Ministry

In our study of Mark we come today to ch.10, where you should hear some ominous music playing in the background. The storm clouds of the crucifixion that first appeared on the horizon two chapters ago are now billowing and filling the sky.

**Mark 10:1 Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan.<sup>1</sup>**

### Jerusalem Looming

Jesus has been telling them, "When we get to Jerusalem, I'm going to be killed." And ever since the Transfiguration, they have been getting closer and closer. And now they're really close. The original readers knew the geography, so when they read verse 1, that he's now in Judea, they would hear the ominous music playing.

**1 ... Again crowds<sup>2</sup> of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.**

So now he's back to public ministry. Up north in Galilee Jesus gave up on the crowds and focused on teaching his disciples in private. But now, down in Judea, Jesus opens back up to the crowds. This is known as Jesus' Judean ministry, which went on for several months. Luke and John devote 17 chapters to this period, but Mark just tells us about three incidents.

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<sup>1</sup> Commentators are puzzled about the order, since the normal way of traveling from the north toward Jerusalem would take one through the region across the Jordan first, and then Judea. But Mark doesn't say what the order was. He simply says he went to both areas. From the other gospels we know this lasted several months, so he may have gone back and forth between the two multiple times.

<sup>2</sup> This is the only time Mark uses the plural for the crowds, indicating different crowds at different times. Crowds kept coming and he kept teaching them. In other words, an extensive public ministry in Judea. That Judean/Perean ministry is described in detail in John 7-11 and Luke 7-18. Mark just crams it all into that little plural—"crowds" and with the phrase "as was his custom."

## Context

And they have a specific purpose. This section of Mark is still teaching us what Jesus meant in ch.8 when he said, “deny yourself and follow me.”<sup>3</sup> We got the basic principles in ch.9, and now in ch.10 Mark is going to make it really practical. He’s going to pick out three specific events from the Judean ministry that will show us what “follow me” looks like in the nuts and bolts of life: first marriage, then children, then possessions. Radical discipleship isn’t about doing grandiose things 1000 miles away. It starts in your own house.

We’ve all seen those people who get the servant of the year award at church. If someone needs help, before he hangs up the phone, he’s putting on his jacket. “I’ll be right there!” He’s helping everybody. But if his wife needs the screen door fixed, it will take 3 months of nagging before he’ll get around to it—and even then he’ll have a bad attitude.

Or the woman in the church who always has a kind word for everyone—if she sees you’re upset about something she’ll pull you aside and pray for you and encourage you from the Scriptures and show all the compassion of Christ. But at home, she’s short with her husband and never spends 2 minutes thinking about how she might encourage his heart. Jesus says, “No, humble servanthood, he starts right in your own living room.”

## Divorce is Rebellion

### The Pharisees’ Test

It begins with your marriage, so Mark describes a moment when the Pharisees brought that topic up. 2 Some Pharisees came and tested<sup>4</sup> him The test is probably designed to get Jesus in trouble with Herod, who killed John for talking about his unbiblical marriage.<sup>5</sup>

#### 2 ... "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

And Matthew adds, “...for any reason.” They are asking, “Can you just divorce whenever you want?”<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere Jesus gives an exception for adultery<sup>7</sup>, but Jesus isn’t talking about that here.<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> This is a distinct section in the book of Mark that goes from the Transfiguration to the final announcement of Jesus’ death.

<sup>4</sup> This word, *peirazo*, can mean to tempt or to test. It can be a good thing or bad thing depending on the motives of the one doing it. In Mark, it’s only used in a negative sense—these three efforts of the Scribes and Pharisees to discredit Jesus, and in 1:13 of Satan tempting Jesus.

<sup>5</sup> Mark gives a clue along this line in the previous verse, where he tells us this happened either in Judea or the region across the Jordan. That area was ruled by Herod Antipas. Where have we seen him before in this gospel? In ch.6, where he cut off John the Baptist’s head—for the crime of speaking out against Herod’s unbiblical divorce and remarriage.

Would the Pharisees actually try to team up with Herod to get Jesus? Remember back in 3:6, after Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus? We’ll see that again in 12:13. **Mark 12:13 Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words.** And the one other time Herod is mentioned in this gospel was in ch.8, where Jesus warned his disciples to watch out for the influence of the Pharisees and Herod. Herod is always linked with the Pharisees in this gospel. So yes, I think we have plenty of evidence that’s what’s going on here. They knew Jesus took a hard line on divorce, and so they bring it up here, most likely in hopes it would get him in trouble with Herod.

<sup>6</sup> In Matthew’s account, their question is, “**Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?**” All sides of the debate back then agreed that divorce was allowable in some circumstances. The debate wasn’t about that; it was about whether there were some restrictions, or if you could divorce just because you found another woman who was prettier. The hard liners said, “No, it has to be something serious.” But most rabbis, and most of the Jewish population believed like our culture believes today—the only reason you need to justify a divorce is that you want a divorce. (At least, that’s how it was for men. Women couldn’t do that.) And they are asking Jesus if he agrees with that. Mark doesn’t spell that all out because he’s given to brevity, and his readers would have understood that was the meaning because that’s what the debate was back then.

<sup>7</sup> If your spouse is sleeping with someone else, God doesn’t want you participating in a three-way relationship, so there are cases where divorce is called for, but generally speaking—divorce just because you’re unhappy in your marriage—forbidden.

<sup>8</sup> Why is Matthew the only one who mentions the exception clause? Jesus said it, but no one includes it except Matthew. Perhaps

question here is about divorce for any reason—divorce just because you’re really unhappy in your marriage.

## Jesus’ Test

That’s their test. How does Jesus do? Does he get an A+ or a C or an F—what does he say?

### 3 "What did Moses command you?" he replied.

Instead of answering, he questions them. Jesus isn’t a student trying to get an A. He’s the teacher. And he doesn’t do what they all did, “Well, what did Rabbi so-and-so say about Rabbi so-and-so’s view ...?” Jesus cuts right through all the theological red tape, bypasses the rabbis, all the traditions of the elders, and goes straight to the Word of God.

## Go to the Word

I wonder how many of our theological arguments would disappear if we did that more. Instead of arguing about Calvinism and Dispensationalism and Premillennialism and all the other “ism’s,” if we just stuck with talking about what individual passages of Scripture mean, there would be a lot less fighting and a whole lot more unity in the church.

## Mosaic Permission

So Jesus turns the tables, puts the Pharisees to the test, and now it’s up to them to try to get an A.

### 3 "What did Moses command you?" 4 They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

They’re talking about Dt.24:1-4, which was the go-to passage on divorce. All their debates about divorce centered on that passage. It’s a passage that says this: If you divorce your wife because of something indecent<sup>9</sup> in her, 1) you have to give her a divorce so she can remarry, and 2) you can’t ever have her back. They took that as permission to divorce as long as there was something indecent, because if all divorce were outlawed, then what would be the point of specifying “something indecent”?<sup>10</sup> And they were right—it was permission. Jesus affirms that in Matthew 19:8.<sup>11</sup>

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because he’s also the only one who mentions the fact that Joseph had planned to divorce Mary as a righteous man. The exception clause was so obvious that it mostly went without saying, but since Matthew had said that about Joseph, maybe he wanted to clear up any confusion, so he included this remark.

<sup>9</sup> The literal phrase is that **he divorces her because he finds in her a matter of nakedness**. That particular word for nakedness is used 54 times, and it’s always in the context of something shameful (when it speaks of people - twice it is used of land - to refer to land that is exposed and unprotected. In verses where nakedness is referred to and there is no shame implied (like Job 1:21 **Naked I came from my mother’s womb...**), a different word is used. This word is always connected with shameful, disgusting things, such as incest or public exposure. The one other place in Scripture where the exact same phrase is found is Dt.23:14, where it describes human waste lying around in the camp that someone might step in. So the law protected men from unfaithful wives as well.

<sup>10</sup> Most rabbis underlined the word “anything.” “If he finds anything indecent in her ...” The hard liners underlined the word “indecent.” They said, “No, can’t be for just anything. It has to be something pretty bad because that word “indecent” is a strong word.” So that was the debate, but all sides agreed that the paragraph was granting permission for divorce.

<sup>11</sup> Even without Matthew’s account, the reader could infer from Mark’s account that Moses did indeed grant permission to divorce because Jesus doesn’t correct them. He seems to accept what they are saying, but then goes on to point out that it was because of hard heartedness. (NIGNTC: “The more restrictive interpretation of the school of Shammai (only on the basis of ‘unchastity’, m. Git. 9:10) was almost certainly a minority view. More typical, probably, is Ben Sira 25:26: ‘If she does not accept your control, divorce her and send her away’”)

## Test Results

So that's their answer. Do they get an A+?

### **5 "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law"**

Jesus says, "You get an F because your hearts are hard." A hard heart refers to stubbornly plugging your ears when God speaks.<sup>12</sup> The reason Dt.24:1-4 had to be written was because people like these Pharisees were so stubborn in their rebellion against God when it came to marriage. Men were just tossing their wives aside whenever they wanted. But they wouldn't give a divorce certificate, so she couldn't remarry. That way he could keep her on the back burner just in case he wanted her again in the future. So the wife would be in this no man's land (literally) without anyone to support her, no way of having a family, any provision—she'd be desolate and would have to live her life just kind of hanging around on call for the guy threw her away. Moses said, "No. It's bad enough that you reject her, you can't make matters even worse by holding her in limbo. You have to let her remarry."<sup>13</sup> So yeah, it was permission—not because God was approving of what the husband was doing, but to protect women from the consequences of their husband's rebellion against God.

## Definition of Marriage

Okay, so they get an F for having hard hearts—and another F for picking the wrong passage. Jesus says, "Not only is your answer wrong; you're not even in the right book of the Bible." Here's the right answer:

### **6 "But at the beginning of creation God `made them male and female'.**

That's Genesis 1:27.

### **7 `For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh.'**

That's Genesis 2:24. Why does Jesus quote Genesis? Because if you want to know God's will about divorce, you have to know the purpose of marriage. Don't go to a passage that just mitigates some of the mess. When they go to Dt.24 to learn about divorce is like someone who goes to flight school but only attends the class on how to do crash landings. That's not the guy you want flying your plane.

## Concordance Theology

Jesus teaches us something very important here about how to do Bible study. The most important passage in the Bible on divorce is a passage that never mentions divorce. Don't just look up words in the Bible, seek the will of God. What are God's desires and purposes? Nothing will improve your marriage more than knowing and loving God's design for marriage.

## At the Beginning of Creation

### **6 "But at the beginning of creation<sup>14</sup> God `made them male and female'**

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<sup>12</sup> If you look up all the uses of the term in the Old Testament, you see that it is defined most often in terms of refusing to listen and obey God.

<sup>13</sup> This passage should not be taken to mean God softened his standard to accommodate human sin. God does not do that ("Thou shalt not murder—unless your heart is hard, then go ahead and murder"). The permission was not to accommodate the hard-hearted sinner; it was to protect the victim of the hard-hearted sinner.

<sup>14</sup> This is a problem for Christians who believe in an old earth. Those people claim the earth was created billions of years before mankind was created. But Jesus says, "No, the man and woman were there *at the beginning* of creation."

This is before sin entered the world, so we get to see God's ideal.

## God's Design for Marriage

### Male and Female

And it starts with, **God `made them male and female'**.<sup>15</sup> This baffling mystery of our age that has our culture completely stumped regarding how many sexes there are. Jesus gives us the answer: 2. Mystery solved.

And what is God's design for marriage—go to Genesis. It was Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve—male and female.

That's a rebuke to transgenderism and homosexuality and all those kinds of perversions. But not just for them. This is important for us too.

As I was studying this, my first question was why verse 6? Why the quotation from Genesis 1? Verse 7 (where he quotes from Genesis 2)—that makes sense. God makes the two one flesh, so what God has joined together don't tear apart—I can see how that argues against divorce. But what does verse 6 contribute to the argument? How does the fact that God made them male and female imply that we should therefore not divorce?

It points to God's design. God's design for marriage is have two people, designed very differently, but made to go together. That's obvious in the sexual union, but it goes beyond that. Every aspect of the marital relationship is to be a union where two very different components fit together to create something much greater than the sum of the parts. Feminine emotions and masculine emotions are designed to be two very different things that fit together to create something greater. Feminine roles and masculine roles in the home, feminine ways of problem solving and masculine ways of problem solving, feminine perspectives and masculine perspectives, feminine traits and masculine traits—they are designed by God to be kept distinct so they can fit together to create something much greater than the sum of the parts.

Many times, married couples get into fights because the woman is annoyed that the man isn't more like her, or the husband get irritated because the woman doesn't think more like a man. But God designed those differences. Every cell in a woman's body is different from a man's. Male skin has fewer nerve endings than female skin, so the same injury hurts her more than him. The same is true with emotional pain. The female brain is much more sensitive to subtle environmental cues. It's also much better suited to verbal interaction. If you numb the left side of a man's brain, there will be a severe loss of verbal skill. If you numb the right side, there is an increase in verbal skill. But you can numb either side of a women's brain and it doesn't affect her speech at all. A woman can literally out-talk a man even with half her brain. Our brains are shaped different and they function differently. Men's brains are better suited to three-dimensional conception than the female brain. Men and women's bodies react differently to stress and are stressed by different things. Men's brains are designed to react more quickly and to be able to make decisions faster than women. Women's brains enable them to be more patient and tolerant than

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<sup>15</sup> It's remarkable to me how much that is emphasized in Genesis—two sexes. God made the man and the woman—male and female. He says it again in ch.5. **Genesis 5:2 He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them "man."** When God refers to the animals, he throws that in, "male and female." Eight time in the book you see that phrase, "male and female." I don't know how many times in Moses' life people teased him by calling him Captain Obvious, but it must have seemed a little strange how much Moses emphasized the fact that there are two kinds of people: male ones and female ones. It was emphasized again and again, not because it was hard to understand (most cultures throughout history have been able to pick up on it—our culture is a rare exception)—the reason it was emphasized is to show us that it's very important. God wanted us to know, this male and female thing, male and female roles—don't mess around with that. It's very important. You will void the manufacturer's warranty if you try to monkey around with that.

That's one way we know it's important. Another way is by watching Satan. The effort Satan pours into confusing the roles of male and female in marriage—he's done that throughout history, and now confusing people about the very concept of male and female altogether—that has been such a consistent and incessant effort on behalf of the evil one, you know it can't be a small matter.

men. When a woman hears a baby cry, oxytocin is secreted in her body, her pupils dilate, and there are various other reactions. None of that happens to a man.

God made men with a greater need for accomplishment. He made women with more of a need for healthy relationships and families ties. If you put two women in a room with nothing but two chairs, they will usually orient the chairs facing toward each other and spend the whole time talking to each other. Two men will orient the chairs side by side and say very little.

When God cursed the woman, the curse centered on children. When God cursed the man, in his role it had to do with earning a living.

Nothing could be more obvious than the fact that God intended male and female to be two very different things. So instead of being irritated that your spouse isn't more like you, take advantage of the way the differences are designed by God to join together to create something much greater.

When you make decisions, do it as a team. Men have greater ability to separate emotion from reason. That's valuable. Women have greater ability to take all factors into consideration in a decision—like the slight color change in the person's face when you brought something up. Or other subtle environmental and relational cues that factor in and give the woman a sense that this approach might be better than that one. It frustrates men, because women can't always put it into words. But the fact is, the female brain is far superior at gathering all factors together into one whole, whereas the male brain is much better at compartmentalized thinking. Both are extremely valuable and are designed to go together.

## **Yoked for a Task**

Two padlocks by themselves are useless. Two keys are worthless. But a padlock and a key together is a complementing kind of union that makes both the lock and the key useful in ways they could never be without the other. That's God's design for masculine characteristics and feminine characteristics in marriage.<sup>16</sup> You get an entity that's greater than the sum of its parts.

A boyfriend and girlfriend is the sum of the parts. But when God joins them, it's something far greater. Look down at verse 9.

### **9 ... what God has joined together ...**

That word literally means *yoked*. Of all the illustrations and word pictures Jesus could have used to describe the way The purpose of a yoke is to enable two animals to work together as one at a common task that neither could do by itself. If each ox can pull 500 pounds, together you would expect 1000 pounds—that would be the sum of the parts. But if they are yoked together, it's more like 1500 pounds.

And that's the word Jesus picked. The unity of marriage is a joining together, done by God, for the purpose of enabling the man and woman to work together at a common task to accomplish something far greater than a boyfriend and girlfriend could accomplish. Marriage is not just for companionship. God has given you a task that you can't do without your spouse. You can't even do half of it without your spouse.

The most obvious example is having children. If you have just a man and no woman, you don't get half a child. You get nothing. And that's true not only of childbearing, but of everything God has called you to do in your marriage.

## **Most Important Relationship**

**7 `For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh.'**

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<sup>16</sup> Even homosexual couples can't seem to help verifying the importance of God's design. I'm told most homosexual couples settle into male and female roles within the relationship. It doesn't work in their case because they aren't really male and female, but it just shows how God's design is confirmed even in those who attempt to destroy it.

Who is your closest relative? It's you, right? A body is its own closest relative, and the marriage union joins two people together as if they were one body.

That is such a profound union that it supersedes even the parent-child relationship.

### **7 `For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.**

Think about that. Your kids came from your body and share your genes. Your spouse isn't even a blood relation. But even the world understands the spouse is a closer family relation.

Take my daughter Nikki. Her relationship with me goes all the way back to when she was in the womb. Her relationship to her husband goes back just a few years. And yet, if she's in the ICU, Brett has more access to her than I do. Even the world acknowledges the marriage relationship as closer and more important than even blood relationships.

That's remarkable humanly speaking, and it's also remarkable from a biblical point of view. Scripture holds the parent-child relationship in extremely high honor. In the OT you can get the death penalty for disrespecting your parents. And yet, when it comes to the point of making a choice, on your wedding day, what's God's design? Leave your father and mother and be united to your spouse.<sup>17</sup>

You're close to your parents, but you aren't one with them. You can only be one with your spouse. Then for those who aren't great at math, he spells it out for us.

## **No Longer Two**

### **8 and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one.**

It's like he's talking to them like children. "He made the two one. So are they two? No. How many are they? One."

Now, they are still distinct individuals, because it's possible for one to be saved and the other lost. So in what sense are they "**no longer two**"?

## **One Timeline**

Well, for one thing, they are no longer on two different timelines. They have one direction and destiny. With a friend, your timeline might intersect with theirs and run parallel for a while, and then at some point split off. But when you get married, you both lock on to the same timeline together for the rest of your life. You can't go your separate ways because it's nonsense to speak of a single line going its separate ways.

## **Divorce is Mutilation**

A divorce isn't two people deciding to go their own ways. It's one indivisible unit being ripped apart. You can't divide one flesh. It's bad enough if a lock and a key split up. But what if you found out your body was planning on getting a divorce? Bad news, right? It would be a mess, because your body is not two parts fastened together at a seam. If your body divided in two, it would be a horror movie. And that's exactly what divorce is. It's a mutilation of the one flesh miracle that God created on your wedding day.

## **Divorce Defies God**

And even worse than the mess and the pain is the fact that it defies the creating work of God. If you want to understand verse 9, just underline the words "God" and "man."

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<sup>17</sup> In the ancient Jewish culture, they got this wrong. For them, your duty to your parents was greater than your duty to your wife. But Scripture is very clear—the highest priority is your spouse.

## **9 Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."**

He's God; you're a creature; don't mutilate his handiwork. Don't rip open a seal that's been stamped by the very hand of God.

If the oneness of marriage came from the man and the woman just agreeing to be one, then the man and the woman could end the oneness by ending their agreement. But the oneness of marriage is a divine act. So don't mess with it. We wouldn't delete words from Scripture. We wouldn't try to sink Noah's Ark. We wouldn't try to unmake the creation. Why would we ever want to do violence to the work of God?

## **Marriage Abortion**

Divorce is to marriage what abortion is to pregnancy. It's a marriage abortion. And it's wrong for the same reason abortion is wrong. And that's not because of the sanctity of life, by the way. Human life is not holy. If a human being dies of natural causes, that's not a moral issue. The only reason abortion is evil is because God has commanded that we not kill innocent human beings. Abortion is wrong, not because of the sanctity of life, it's because of the sanctity of God.

A man and wife can decide to conceive a child if they want. But they are not free to end that life. If your child is turning out to be a handful, as a teenager he's creating a lot of hardship for you, you don't say, "Well, my only option is to kill him. I know God wants me to be happy. I know God wouldn't want me to go through life miserable, so I'll just destroy the child."

And it's the same with marriage. God lets us decide if we want to get married. That's up to us. But it's like starting a human life – you can start it, but it's not your prerogative to destroy it.

## **Let Man Not Separate**

### **9 what God has joined together, let man not separate.**

That's in the imperative mood. "*Do not* separate what God has joined together." Don't divorce.

And, by that same logic, don't do anything that does harm to the oneness of marriage. Anything you ever do that hinders that oneness does violence to the work of God.

## **Divorce is Unfaithfulness**

### **10 When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this.**

This is the pattern in Mark. Jesus gives a hard word to the crowd or Pharisees, then later he gives further explanation to his disciples in private if they ask about it. And they definitely asked about this, because this one really made no sense to them.<sup>18</sup>

## **Lifelong Commitment**

Matthew gives more detail of this conversation.

**Matthew 19:10 The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."**

"Jesus, what you're saying sounds absurd. If we take what you're saying at face value, it would be better for no one to ever get married." And from a natural, human point of view, it is absurd. Why would you make a lifelong commitment to another person? If you did that in any other area, you'd be a fool. At

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<sup>18</sup> There were some rabbis who took a harder line on grounds for divorce, but nobody was saying no divorce at all except for adultery. Their culture was just like our secular culture today—you can divorce whenever you want for any reason or no reason.

age 20, if someone asked me to commit to live in Colorado until the day I die, I'd be a fool to say yes, even though I love Colorado. You wouldn't do that because you don't know what's going to happen in the future. If someone offered you a job—even if it were your dream job, if they required you to sign a life-long contract, you'd be a fool to sign it, right? Things can change. They could get new ownership, new management, the job could turn into a nightmare.

You wouldn't make a lifelong commitment in any other area because things can change. But what's more changeable than a human being? Companies change fairly slow, States change really slow, but people—just about the only thing you know for sure about the person you are marrying is that they will be a very different person 20 years from now. How closely do you resemble that person your spouse first married? You really have no idea what anyone is going to be like even 10 years from now. Can you imagine the woman who married Joshua Harris, who literally wrote the book on Christian relationships? Then 20 years later he walked away from the faith altogether. People change.

And I don't want to single out either of the sexes, but there's one of the two sexes that, let's just say they have great variety of dispositions. You can't even predict what she will be like hour to hour, much less decade to decade.

So why does every culture have, as part of their legal system, this arrangement where couples make lifelong, legally binding commitments to one another? It's the most personal, private kind of relationship, and yet there is an official, public, legally binding arrangement. Where did that come from? Is that natural? Take a typical college student who convinces some girl to sleep with him. Is his natural pre-programmed response to commit to her for life? No. it's not natural, it's not logical, it's not explainable from a human perspective.

The marriage relationship exists because God created it when he created mankind and designed it to be a model of his relationship with his people. And for that reason, it requires a total, complete, lifelong commitment, and anything short of that is unfaithfulness.

## Adultery

And that's the part Jesus talks to the disciples about afterwards in the house. When he was talking to the Pharisees, he made the point that divorce is wrong because it undoes the work of God. But in the house with the disciples he gives them another reason it's wrong. Not only does it do violence to the work of God, but it's also unfaithfulness to your spouse. That's why he uses the term *adultery*.

**11 He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. 12 And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."<sup>19</sup>**

Think about the concept of adultery for a second. That's another thing that's unique to the marital relationship. If I love you as a friend, and I love someone else with that same kind of love, I'm not betraying you. If I love one of my children, then I love another one of my children, I'm not being unfaithful to that first child. I'm not cheating on a plate of brownies when I enjoy a banana split. Every

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<sup>19</sup> This was a remarkable statement to make in that culture. In the Jewish system, adultery could only be committed against a man. If a wife slept with another man, she committed adultery against her husband. If a man slept with his neighbor's wife, that man was committing adultery, not against his wife, but against the neighbor woman's husband (NIGNTC). For Jesus to speak of the possibility of committing adultery against your wife was a radically new concept for that culture.

A woman divorcing her husband was another thing that didn't happen in the Jewish world. Roman women had a legal right to divorce, but not Jewish women. Sometimes you hear people writing off certain passages of Scripture by saying, "Oh, that's just Jesus accommodating the ignorance of his culture." What Jesus said wasn't really true, but he had to talk that way to be understood because of the ignorance of the culture he lived in." I don't buy that primarily because I don't believe Jesus would ever say anything untrue for any reason. But also because of passages like this, where Jesus didn't accommodate himself to the culture one bit, even if it made what he was saying sound like nonsense to those people.

This also shows us that Jesus intended his words, right from the start, to go to the whole world, not just the Jews. they are no longer two independent beings who may choose to go their own way, but a single indivisible unit.

other kind of love in the world is inclusive. Marital love is the only kind that is exclusive. If you give it to someone besides your spouse, you destroy your relationship with your spouse. It's the only relationship in the world where the concept of adultery even makes sense.

## **Cruel**

The unique oneness makes marriage can bring you a degree of joy and fulfilment and companionship unparalleled in any human relationship. But to have that unique joy, it requires total, lifelong commitment. Recently there was a study published in the NY Times about how married couples are happier than couples who just live together. They are happier in every category that the study looked at. They are more likely to be highly satisfied with the other partner's parenting, or how the partner balances family and work, division of chores, the partner's communication skills—all these categories, every single one of them dropped way down for couples who just lived together. And the researchers were stumped as to why. The report said, "We can't explain why married people are happier when we accounted for all the various factors."

How about this: Sexual love is a unique kind of love that flourishes where there is the security of a lifelong commitment. If the possibility of my partner leaving me is always hanging out there, that kills so many aspects of intimacy. God designed marital love to need guaranteed, life-long security. It has to be like my relationship with God, so I know for sure my spouse will *never* reject me.

It has to be that way because the greater the intimacy the greater the vulnerability. The reason marriage is the most intimate kind of relationship is because you expose yourself completely to your spouse. But in doing so, you make yourself incredibly vulnerable. And so if there's any chance at all that the person might reject you, it spoils everything and the relationship can't function as God designed it.

And for that reason, divorce is one of the cruelest things you can do to a human being. Even threatening divorce is incredibly cruel. If a stranger rejects me, so what? But if the person who knows me best rejects me, that hurts me in ways no one else can hurt me. If someone in business makes you a promise and then breaks it, that might cost you some money. You lose whatever you risked by trusting that promise. But think of what your spouse risked on the promise you made on your wedding day. They gave up their singleness, gave you their youth, gave you their body—their whole life. By marrying your spouse you took things from them they can never get back. They risked all that on the confidence that you would be faithful to your promise. They gave you their youth on the promise you'd be there in their old age.

Marriage can bring greater joy and fulfilment than any other relationship; but it can also bring pain and heartbreak like no other relationship when it collapses. It's ironic, because people get divorced because they want to be happy. But does it? When's the last time someone told you she just went through a divorce and you ask how it went and she says, "Oh, it was a blast!" I loved every minute of it!

You hear a lot about teen suicide rates, or suicides among the elderly, but do you know what the most at risk category of people is when it comes to suicide—by far? Middle aged divorced people. No other category comes anywhere close. Divorced people are 240% more likely to commit suicide than the rest of the population. People get divorced because they want to be happy and all it does is multiply misery because it rips apart what's not supposed to be ripped apart and it's the most profound act of betrayal and unfaithfulness humanly possible.

## **Takeaways**

Let me give you three takeaways from this passage.

## 1) Learn to Love God's Design

When you see the beauty and wisdom of the merging of maleness and femaleness in all the different categories and understand the greater whole that results, nothing will improve your marriage more than that. Spend the rest of your life studying maleness and femaleness.

## 2) Be Faithful

And faithfulness is more than just not sleeping around. To be faithful means to be reliable in your love—like God. In your relationships—friendships, relationships at church, with your kids, other family, and especially in your marriage; be reliable in your love. If there's a standing threat that warmth or affection might be withdrawn tomorrow if certain things happen—even if it doesn't happen, the mere threat or possibility of it will kill the joy and intimacy of any relationship, but especially marriage.

## 3) Enjoy God's Faithfulness

Every one of us has been stung by the pain of unfaithfulness in one way or another. The more you've felt that pain, the more ability you have to appreciate what a wonderful thing reliability and faithfulness really is, which means you have more ability to delight in and enjoy that attribute of God. We are his bride, and he will never fail us or forsake us, and who can separate us from his love?

**Romans 8:38 Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Summary: The Pharisees test Jesus on divorce, but he responds by testing them. They get an F because of their hard hearts and because they chose the wrong passage (permission for protecting women from their hard hearts) rather than God's purpose in marriage. Divorce is wrong because it breaks up the marvelous single entity God creates in marriage. And because it is unfaithfulness to your spouse. Learn to love God's design, be faithful, and enjoy God's faithfulness.