

Mark 10:1-12 TEACHING on DIVORCE

INTRODUCTION. Like last week, I do **not** want to preach what we have here in course in Mark! But we must. An increasingly important subject! There is a lot of **confusing** regarding **remarriage**. Many people think that the **only** biblical and moral ground for divorce is **adultery**! For years people have held that view - and still do! On the **surface**, the Bible **seems** to teach that - but **I now believe** it does not! I have come to that conclusion after reading various books, especially 'Divorce' by Frank Retief, C of E in South Africa.

BACKGROUND, SITUATION ADDRESSED & DEU 24:1-4

In Israel, there was an **abuse** of Jewish Law. The false teachings of Rabbis Hillel and Akiba was based on an **erroneous** exegesis of [Deu 24]. In Mark and parallel passages, Jesus is **contradicting** these Rabbis who had the false teaching. He is addressing the misunderstanding regarding divorce and Deu 24. In [Deu 24], God was **providing protection** for the **abused** wife. The continuation of her marriage depended largely on the **caprice** (mood) of her husband. He could order her out of his home and then, on reflection, take her back, virtually at will. If in one of his fits of rage, he turned her out, he would **claim** he had divorced her. But after some time (when he discovered there was no one to do the cooking or washing) he might decide to take her back.'! In the interim period, she might have married someone else (she **needed** someone to support her). 'If her 1st husband insisted that she was still his wife, he **could** take her forcibly from the 2nd husband and **she** would be **stigmatised** as an **adulteress**'!! This **happened a lot** in Israel!

So God initiated this law to show that 'putting away innocently 'the 2nd marriage **was legitimate**. There needed to be **legislation** to **prove** that the 1st marriage **had ended**, and to **protect** the 2nd marriage so that the 1st husband could **not** interfere with it'! God was **caring** for the socially disadvantaged (ie, this poor woman who had done nothing really wrong but was turfed out of her home, the victim of an angry husband!) The 2nd marriage was giving her a chance at finding security and happiness.

The teachings of Rabbis Hillel and Akiba **encouraged** this sort of situation where the wife was a **victim** of an ungodly husband. The School of Hillel said [He may divorce her} ‘even if she spoiled a dish for him, **as it is written** ‘Because he has found in her indecency **in anything**’. R Akiba said ‘Even if he found another fairer than she, **for it is written** ‘And it shall be that if she find **no favour** in **his eyes...**’!! [Keener p39]. They distorted the Scripture meaning and it became the **accepted meaning** in the community and culture!

God’s law therefore provided **4 advantages** to help women. (1) There had to be **adequate grounds** for divorce. A husband must not turn away his wife at a whim or a fancy or because he was drunk (2) It had to be **legally in writing** and put in the hands of the woman herself by the husband to say she was **legally divorced!** (3) There was **time** for a ‘**cooling-off**’ period to make the husband think again. (4) This law **prevented the wife from having to return to her 1st husband** - which happened a lot because many wives had nowhere else to stay! So, this law also **prevented frivolous reasons** for divorce. **How often we hear today about **incompatibility** which is very often used as an **excuse** for just wanting a change of partner perhaps because they have met someone else more attractive!

MARK 10:2-12 (The most difficult of all the ‘divorce’ passages)

Make **no mistake** about it - God **hates divorce!** But it is **not necessary** a **sin** to divorce. There **can** be **proper** reasons for divorce! But God still hates it and wants **everything possible** to be done to avoid it! But even then, sometimes there **is nothing** that can be done to save a marriage. **Both** parties must be willing to continue. In the passage before us, Jesus is asked “*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?*”[2]. Jesus asked **them** “*What did Moses command you?*” They replied “*Moses **allowed** a man to **write a certificate of divorce...***”[4]. Jesus replies that ‘Yes, he did. But marriage is a **very serious** thing, in marriage “*God has **joined together***” so “*let **not** man separate*”[9] The **disciples** are **not clear** so they ask Jesus in the house. He replies “*Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery **against her***”!![11] **He** is the **culprit!** Jesus is

assuming there is guilt in this putting away ‘Whoever divorces his wife **wrongfully** by not giving her a proper divorce certificate’ is what Jesus means! **He** is committing adultery because he is not legally divorced. And “*if she divorces her husband (wrongfully) and marries another, she commits adultery*” [12b]. It is not divorce that is wrong, it is the things that **led to** the divorce that is wrong. Such as: Unfaithfulness, unreasonable behaviour, physical violence, drunkenness, irresponsibility, breaking of vows, etc! All these things are wrong **per se!** Not just re marriage but any time! For a husband to fail to **provide**, to fail to **support**, to fail to **comfort**, to fail to **love**, is in breach of his vows! A breach of the marriage **covenant**. Con of Faith says ‘willful desertion...as can not be remedied’ [24.6]

The other parallel passages [**Mat 5:31,32 + Mat 19:3-12**] can all very simply be **interpreted** to mean. Retief= ‘Jesus was not blaming the divorced wife but the cruel husband who had discarded her for no good reason, tarnishing her reputation and the reputation of anyone who married her....He was **criticising** the prevailing **practice** which had abandoned the **protection** the law gave the wife, making her a social outcast.’ [Retief p112] **All** the passages **can legitimately without** any ‘theological gymnastics’ be **interpreted** to mean that its the **cruel actions** of the husband that Jesus is condemning! Retief: ‘as a Christian woman you have no right to remain in a wicked demeaning situation. Ignore the advice of well-meaning friends and family who, in their ignorance of Bible teaching, will tell you to pray, submit and keep the family together’ [p271]. Be sure, of course that every possible avenue has been tried to reconcile matters.

****You see, God’s law is good!** It was given to **help** and **improve** the injustices of society. You/I may **think** some of the OT laws are cruel but that is because we do not know the culture or the practices they were addressing. There is so much misunderstanding as to what the Bible **is teaching!** It is amazing how many Xns **forbid remarriage** even for the innocent party! But Jesus was teaching that if there is legitimate divorce, there is legitimate remarriage.

****Breaking your vows is more than adultery!** For ‘better or for

worse' does **not include** accepting **violent behaviour!** Or **Abuse**= physical or psychological, or a **constant** undermining your confidence, demeaning behaviour, a 'wearing you down' of verbal abuse! Breaking your vows also includes **Abandoning** your **commitments** to love, cherish, provide, support your wife in **all** her needs!

A MICROCOSM of the WHOLE GOSPEL

Marriage and Divorce is a **microcosm** of the whole gospel! When God created man, He entered into a **covenant** with him, and **promised** to provide, not just for his needs, but for his happiness and security. He asked us one thing - 'Don't eat from that tree'! God has **kept** His promises, but **we** have broken that **covenant** with our Creator by our **disobedience!** By our self-centeredness and disregard for His will. God is now 'free' from His obligations in that covenant to divorce us! He can **legitimately divorce** us. But friends, He does **not want a divorce!** He wants **reconciliation!** "*Be ye reconciled to God*" is the **cry** of the **gospel!** It is the gospel message! We can be friends again! We **can** do so much together.

Jeffrey Archer's book 'Kane & Abel' – 2 businessmen who **hated** each other! Determined to '**outdo**' the other. Dirty tricks, sacrificed, the lot. Early on, Abel got into unfortunate financial trouble but anonymous donor saved him! Abel believed it was from a friend he remembered about who had a high regard for him and had plenty money! Kane & Abel rivalled all thru their lives. Eventually Kane died –Abel discovered it was Kane the anonymous donor! "We **could** have been friends – he believed in me – we could have done so much together"! **APP** There is a sense in which God '**believes in you**'. He believes you and He can do great things together. He invites you to become His best friend and to live with Him for ever.

*Judgement Day many will see God could have been their best friend!! Instead **we** made Him as it were our enemy. **APP** The 'Good News' today is that God doesn't want to be our enemy! **He** wants to be our **best friend!** *God and you have been "*joined together*". Do not let **anyone separate** you! "*What therefore God has joined together let not man separate*"[9]!