

Marriage, Divorce, and the Declaration of the Gospel

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Text: Mark 10:1-12¹

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Series: Mark (What if God were One of Us?)

Introduction: Open your Bible to **Mark 10:1-12**. This morning we are talking about “Marriage, Divorce and the Declaration of the Gospel”.

Marriage. Divorce. Remarriage. The Gospel. These are the themes of today’s text. We need to guard our marriages. Now this is not a message about how to have a happy marriage or how to be happy in marriage. If you haven’t understood yet, you need to, that marriage was not created to make you happy. It can be happy and joyous. But that is not the primary purpose. We are going to see that marriage is an expression of the Gospel. Marriage ultimately tells us that God is faithful to all who trust him. It is a living illustration of Christ’s love for His church. It demonstrates the church’s affection and submission to Christ. That’s why all who are married need to stay married until death.

Marriage can be very tough and hard because it is a laying down of you life for your spouse. Christ will never leave you nor forsake you, so you should not leave or forsake your spouse.

Marriage is to demonstrate how Christ loves the church and gives His life for it, and how the church is devoted to Christ. We so often fail, and that is why this message is mostly about God’s faithfulness to us, and the wonderful Gospel that tells us God will never forsake us.

So what about divorce? This was a question that Jesus answered in Mark 10. Let’s look at it.

Mark 10:1-12, “And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them. 2 And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” 3 He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” 4 They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” 5 And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. 6 But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ 7 ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, 8 and they shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” 10 And in the house the disciples asked him again about

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

this matter. 11 And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, 12 and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

[Prayer for Guidance]

Divorce was prevalent in Jesus’ day just as it is in our day. If Jesus were here today, we’d ask him about it. So let’s ask Jesus this question and hear his answer in Mark 10. Let’s listen to the Lord today. The Pharisees bring this very controversial question to Jesus. Divorce was very very prevalent in Jesus’ day.

I. Consider the **Prevalence** of Divorce.

Verses 1-2, “And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them. 2 And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”. This question was asked because divorce was quite prevalent in Jesus’ day.

A. Divorce was a controversial issue in **Jesus’ day**. The Jews divorced and remarried in Jesus’ day as much or more than our own culture. There were two schools of thought in Jesus’ day. Rabbi Shammai taught you could only divorce if the woman was found to be immoral during the betrothal period. Rabbi Hillel, which was the prevalent view, taught that you could divorce for any reason.

This was a controversial issue. Jesus is now entering realm of Herod Antipas on his way to Jerusalem. Remember Herod Antipas had beheaded John for John’s views on divorce and remarriage. Perhaps the Pharisees wanted to use this to incriminate Jesus. I’m telling you divorce was a controversial issue in Jesus day, as it is in our day.

B. Divorce is controversial in **our day**. Our culture does not take marriage seriously. Consider that four or five out of ten marriages in our culture today will turn to divorce. Divorce devastates families and children. It is the cause of years of bitterness and distress. It tears children apart.

Testimony: I am from a family that decided to divorce. My mother divorced my father after 24 years of marriage for a love affair. The love affair lasted about six weeks, and then my mother lived another six years and died at the age of 49. Each member of my family has suffered because of it. Without Christ, divorce becomes the norm for many who don’t want to deal with the difficulties of marriage.

We want to present the teaching of Jesus today on divorce and remarriage. What does Jesus say to the Pharisees? He tells them to go back to Moses.

II. Consider the **Practice** of Moses.

Verses 3-4, “He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” 4 They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away”.

That’s exactly right. God regulated divorce in the Old Testament in **Deuteronomy 24:1**, “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found **some indecency** in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house”.

A. The practice of divorce in **Jesus’** day.

There was a controversy in Jesus’ day over two schools of rabbis. The two views over divorce really revolved around the interpretation of this phrase “some indecency”.

1. The school of **Hillel** had a very lenient interpretation of this. A man could divorce his wife for any reason –
 - even the burning of food
 - a wife walking around with her hair down,
 - or speaking to other men on the street,
 - or perhaps speaking disrespectfully of her husband's parents in her husband's presence
 - Rabbi Akiba, who was of Hillel's school, went even further - he believed the phrase here in Deuteronomy 24, “she finds no favor in his eyes”, meant that a man could divorce his wife if he found another woman more beautiful than her - imagine it!
2. Then you had the school of **Shammai** who taught a couple could only divorce if the woman was found not to be a virgin during the betrothal period.

At the wedding, the young couple would consummate the marriage. Shortly after their arrival the bridal pair were escorted by their closest friends to the bridal chamber, referred to as the “huppah”. These friends making up the wedding party would then wait at the door while the couple consummated the marriage, entering into physical union for the first time. This would finalize the marital agreement which had been covenanted earlier.

After the consummation the groom would step out and announce to the wedding party that the marriage had been finalized and completed. In later years it became tradition for the groom to bring out the sheet from off of the wedding bed to prove the chastity and virginity of his bride. This was a sign of honor to both him and his new wife.

So these were the two schools – one was lenient, and one was strict. It all hinged on the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24. But when Jesus asked, “What did Moses say?” He was not referring to Deut. 24. He was referring to Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. He brought them back to the beginning.

III. Consider the **Plan** of God for Marriage.

Verses 5-9, “And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. 6 But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ 7 ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, 8 and they shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. 9 **What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate**”.

So what do we learn here?

A. We learn about God’s **design** in marriage. We learn that Marriage is God’s idea. Man should not mess with God’s design. Jesus calls us back to the beginning to return to the original standard of faithfulness by pointing back to the original design of God. He says, “But from the **beginning** of creation, God made them male and female” (verse 6).

Jesus goes back to the beginning and from Genesis to establish God’s original plan for marriage.

- **Genesis 1:27**, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”
- You see, **Deuteronomy 24** was not the **desire of God’s heart**, nor his design. This exception testified to the **hardness of the Jews’ own hearts**. God tolerated and regulated the hardness of their hearts in his Law. He does this with other things as well. He regulated slavery and polygamy. Listen, these things are wrong, but so the culture and society would not get out of control, God regulated these things.

B. God put the **desire** for marriage in us. Most want to leave our parents and cleave to a spouse. This is the desire for marriage, and this was God’s design. Jesus goes back to the beginning again and quotes **Genesis 2:24** to prove this.

He says, “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ 7 ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, 8 and they shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh” (**verses 6-8**).

He’s quoting **Genesis 2:24** which records the first marriage.

- **Genesis 2:24**, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

The leaving of father and mother and the cleaving to each other to form a new family unit, is God’s design and idea which is rooted in the way He created and designed us as male and female.

C. Jesus makes a powerful **declaration**. Man is not to separate what God has joined. Marriage is something God ultimately does, not man. Then he gives one of the most important and powerful declarations and commands in the Bible. In verse 9 he says, “Therefore what God has joined together [the declaration], let no man separate [the command].” The declaration is that **marriage is the work of God**. Marriage is that which “God has joined together...”

The union of marriage is something that God does. It is not just a human decision. Or a human tradition. This is true even for people who don't believe in God. Marriage is something God does, not just man. Therefore we see that God designed it in Genesis and God joined you together with your spouse the day you got married. Therefore, I say, marriage is a work of God and gets its meaning from God.

D. **Death** alone separates a marriage. Therefore, Jesus ends his answer to the Pharisees, with the powerful command, “Let no man separate [what God joined].” **Since it is God's joining, only God can separate, and that separation is by death!**

Romans 7 as well, among other places, tells us that there is only one thing that ought to separate a marriage—it is an act of God in death. God brings death to a spouse, and you are free to remarry.

IV. Finally let's consider the **Possibility** of Adultery. Verse 10 says the disciples want to ask the question again. **Verse 10**, “And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter.” Is it lawful to divorce and remarry? Jesus answers them in verses 11-12.

- First he addresses the **man** who is thinking about leaving his wife to marry another woman: **Verse 11**, “And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her.””
- Then in verse 12 he turns it around and focuses on the **woman** who is thinking about leaving her husband for another man: **Verse 12**, “and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

Whoa. Jesus takes divorce seriously. What's the point of these two verses? Why does Jesus say this? Doesn't he know that in his audience and this audience are people who are divorced and remarried? Leaving your marriage is serious!

Tom Hovestall writes in his book “Extreme Righteousness”:

“We live in a culture in which promises and commitments, even solemnly made ones, are routinely broken. Our wedding ceremonies, baptism rituals, infant dedications, and church membership covenants, to varying degrees, include pious oaths which we cavalierly break. Every divorce', he says, 'is a major violation of

the promise 'Till death us do part'. However, we spend most of our theological energy debating when it is OK to break our promises.”

We as the church need to be different than our culture. **Many people today treat marriage like a backyard swimming pool for lounging around as long as we feel like it.**

Let me answer some hard questions about divorce and remarriage, and then challenge you and tell you ultimately why faithfulness in marriage is so important.

A. Questions.

1. **Does God ever permit divorce?** There is not perfect agreement on this, but most Bible teachers agree that divorce is permitted for two reasons: unrepentant adultery and desertion by an unbeliever.

(1.) Unrepentant **adultery**. **Matthew 19:9**, “whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” The key is the interpretation of the word “sexual immorality” which is the Greek word *pornea*. Most agree that it is more than just adultery, because he could have said “adultery”, but it is at minimum unrepentant adultery and includes devious sexual sins.

(2.) **Desertion** by an unbeliever. **1 Corinthians 7:15**, “But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.”

2. **If remarriage in any other circumstance is adultery, what about those that have remarried without biblical grounds?** What should they do?

I do not think that a person who remarries against God’s will, and thus commits adultery in this way, should later break the second marriage.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 forbids one who is remarried to go back and marry his first wife. This tells us that God recognizes the second marriage.

In other words, the marriage should not have been done, but now that it is done, it should not be undone by man. It is a real marriage. Real vows have been made and sexual union has happened. And that real covenant of marriage may be purified by the blood of Jesus and set apart for God.

I don’t think that a couple who repents and seeks God’s forgiveness, and receives his cleansing, should think of their lives as ongoing adultery, even though, in the eyes of Jesus, that’s how the relationship started.

B. Application.

1. To the married. You are a picture of Christ and the church. Demonstrate how Jesus will never forsake his church.

Ephesians 5:25-32, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

2. To the single. You are betrothed to Christ. Be a chaste virgin until the Bridegroom comes! Paul says to the church at **2 Corinthians 11:2**, “I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” Demonstrate the holiness of Christ’s church!

I think the aim of Jesus here is **prevention, not destruction**. Jesus is talking to those who can still turn back from getting a divorce. And he is saying: marriage is God's idea: he designed it, he described it, and he does it. It is one of the deepest realities in the world. Deeper than any of us knows. What God joins together he joins deeply together - deeper than feelings, deeper than promises, deeper than sex, deeper than friendship.

Conclusion: Let me close with good news. Though in our sinfulness, we may divorce and remarry, Jesus will never commit adultery on us. He will never leave us or forsake us.

Jesus says, Don’t divorce your spouse and marry someone else. If you do, you’ve committed adultery. Why is it adultery? *Ultimately*, it is adultery because it betrays the truth about Christ that marriage is meant to display. Jesus never, never, never does that to his bride, the church. He never forsakes her. He never abandons her. He never abuses her. He always loves her. He always takes her back when she wanders. He always is patient with her. He always cares for her and provides for her and protects her and, wonder of wonders, delights in her. And you—you who are married once, married five times, married never—if you repent and trust Christ—receive him as the treasure who bore your punishment and became your righteousness—you are in the bride. And that is how he relates to you. “Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43).