

Mark 10:1-12 What God Joined Together Falls OPC PM October 23, 2022

In verse 1, Jesus taught crowds, which means He taught in public on one of the basic ingredients of life - the topic of marriage. What could be a more foundational building block of society than marriage? The main point and application to Christians today is clear: **Divorce is forbidden, since it dishonors God and threatens the stability of families, churches, and societies.**

1. Breaking God-built marriages begins with the bad practice of twisting Scripture. (v.1-4)

In verse 2, the Pharisees wanted to test Jesus with a “gotcha” question – is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

Verse 3, in characteristic fashion for the wisest human being who ever lived, Jesus turned the question back to the questioners, and pointed them back to the other writings of God through Moses, writings that neither side had considered in their debates.

Verse 4, the Pharisees said divorce is allowed! That is twisting Scripture!

They were referring to a controversy on the meaning of a passage in the Bible. Deuteronomy 24:1-4, “*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 ...*” It gets pretty complicated. If a man divorced a woman, and she married a 2nd man, and then the 2nd man divorced her, then the first man was not allowed to marry her again. The passage was not saying divorce was allowed, but rather that when divorce was happening, you were not allowed to descend into full societal chaos.

The debate about interpreting that verse, was about what constituted when a wife “*found no favor in [her husband’s] eyes,*” and what did he find when he has found “*some indecency*” in her. The debates about divorce in those days went back and forth. Some people said it would need to be proven adultery. Other people said nearly anything could count, even if she accidentally burned a meal and served it to her husband. So, the Pharisees were trying to trick Jesus by getting Him to take one side or the other in a heated and terrible debate. Either way, they would have an argument to use against Jesus.

The Pharisees wanted to talk about divorce, but Jesus insisted on talking about marriage. The Pharisees’ primary interest was seeing how far people could go and still remain within the letter of the law. In contrast, the primary interest of Jesus was restoring people to the home life for which they had been created.

2. Breaking God-built marriages exposes the bad condition of hardness of heart. (v. 5-9)

In verse 5, Jesus clarified how the Pharisees had twisted the words of God through Moses. Moses had only written about permitting divorce because of the

hardness of the hearts of the people had made such a mess of things, that some regulations regarding divorce had become necessary. The phrase “hardness of heart” picks up on a frequent Old Testament accusation against people, that they were stiff-necked which means rebellious and stubborn. Hardened against God was the core idea. Furthermore, Jesus in just a few words, went deeper and earlier than Moses in order to explain what was originally God’s best vision for their home lives! Since principles of design take precedent over principles of remedy and repair, it is best to return to the original design.

In verse 6, Jesus introduced a more fundamental consideration. Here Jesus was no longer drawing from the law code given by Moses on Mount Sinai, but much earlier. Jesus was now drawing from the first days of the world, the original order and structure of creation, even before the fall of Adam into sin! Here in verse 6, Jesus quoted from Genesis 1:27, “*male and female [God] created them.*” Since marriage was started as a permanent union in a one-flesh manner between man and woman, then it must always be against the will of God the Creator for a marriage that God built, with two people that God had created, to be broken by a human being.

When Moses conceded certain permissions for divorce, it was not pointing to the way things ought to be! God had explained the way things ought to be in Genesis 1. The way things ought to be is one unique female puzzle piece and one unique male puzzle piece, both fitted together into one solved and completed puzzle. That mystery of marriage staying together in precisely the way that God designed them and assembled them!

The marriage vision for the kingdom of God must not be based on a concession to human failure. Rather, the way we view marriage in the kingdom of God should be based on the original pattern for marriage, set out in God’s creation of a man and God’s creation of a woman as a perfect match for a man!

In verse 7, this is how it is supposed to work for all marriages. What is so special about these two is that God, in His perfect providential care of all things, has guided that exact man and that exact woman to meet and to become married, and so the two have become a team, a unit. A family unit that is so close, so tight, and operating so well together that they become as one. One what? One flesh. One home. One couple. One flesh. So be it. And so Jesus emphasized it with a beautiful statement in verse 8, “*so, they are no longer two but one flesh.*” Something so beautiful has happened, that we have run past the end of the ability of language to describe the oneness that God has caused by joining together of a man and a wife. What is that beauty and glory? That the two are no longer two. How is that beautiful? Because they are one. They became one flesh, one team, one unified home. God Himself has joined them together, and it is marvelous!

The design of God is for the union of man and woman to become permanent and indivisible. Marriage is lifted up from being a mere contract of mutual

convenience for activity and actions, such that it is easier to run a farm when one is in the field and one is in the house. No, it is more than that and higher than that. It is raised to the level of the status of being. It has to do with who we are. So, it is no longer a matter of whether the one flesh union should not be separated, but rather the one flesh union CANNOT be separated. It is not a question of whether they would be more or less efficient apart, or more or less happy together or apart, but the emphasis is on the fact that we are well past the time when they were apart, and they just ARE TOGETHER, and no one can separate them. What we have in marriage is no longer two independent beings who may choose to go their own way, but rather what we have in marriage is a single indivisible unit.

Take two uncooked eggs and superglue them together. Any attempt to separate those two eggs will just make a mess.

We cannot separate what God has joined together without making a mess. A painful mess for everyone.

Who did that joining together of two? Who made that beautiful unit that it is so difficult to put into words? God!

Who makes divorce? Who decides on that rupture? Man! It is never God!

In the teaching of Jesus in verse 9, divorce is to be rejected because it is initiated by a human being, and not by God. What God has joined together let not man separate! Why? Because man does not have the authority to disassemble what the divine alone could assemble! Divorce is forbidden because it is a human decision to destroy a piece of the artwork of God. Divorce is not allowed because it starts with human initiation.

The one flesh condition is a fact. It is not a matter of ongoing continued choice of two persons, as if they reach their anniversary date and sit down at dinner to decide whether or not to re-up for another year. No way. It does not operate like that at all. The one-flesh condition is not continued only until either or both of those persons opt to make a different choice, and at that moment the one-flesh condition evaporates. No! The one flesh condition is a fact and it is a reality. Marriage is for life, and for all of life. Same home, same relatives, shared everything. Anything that goes against this marriage unit, is going against the God who built that marriage.

Jesus made this incredible statement that the Pharisees could not have possibly understood fully. Here is the statement of Jesus that has been repeated at thousands of weddings since then, “*What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.*” Human initiative must not try to undo what God has done, to untie the knot that God has tied, to make two persons what God has made one flesh. The man must not try to separate himself from his wife. The wife must not try to separate herself from her husband. No other person must not try to break up this home. Not her sister, not his brother. Not his best friend, not her friend. Not her lawyer not his lawyer, not her mother, not his mother. Not an old boyfriend or girlfriend. Not a

child or grandchild. No one should be trying to pull apart what God has glued together.

How refreshing it is for Jesus to step up and teach in this wrong-headed context. Jesus has clear-sighted vision for the community to return to a vision of marriage for “the way it was meant to be.” There is a compelling simplicity here.

3. Breaking God-built marriages leads to the bad consequences of more sin. (v.10-12)

Verse 10, “*in the house*” means that the disciples were alone with Jesus, and could ask Him confidential questions without the crowds or the Pharisees hearing their question or the answer of Jesus. The disciples were in need of reorientation and re-training.

Verses 11-12, “*Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.*”

How could a divorce result in adultery? Because the original one-flesh union was inseparable, and so the purported divorce certificate did not change that.

Jesus was in verse 11 looking out for the rights of the wife, with the words at the very end of verse 11, “*commits adultery against her*”! Similarly in verse 12, Jesus saw Himself as the Teacher and savior of both men and women. For Jesus, there is a remarkable equality of the sexes here in terms of responsibility, in terms of categories of sin, and in terms of the resulting consequences of their actions.

Here in Mark 10, in a few words, Jesus discouraged divorce, refuted the wrong interpretation of Scripture by the Pharisees, reaffirmed the true meaning of Scripture about marriage, censured the guilty party, defended the innocent, and upheld the sacredness of the marriage bond as ordained by God.

Know Christ’s faithfulness to us. God will not separate Himself from us when He finds us disappointing and unfaithful to Him. Christ is the husband, we are the bride. Paul wrote about this in the classic marriage passage in Ephesians 5. Listen starting with verse 25, “*Husband love your wives, as Christ loved the church, and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word...*”

Christ died for us as His people, and that is what we need to know and remember. Earthly husbands are to love their wives this way. To give up self for her. Christ-like love is self-giving love.

But Paul goes on. Ephesians 5:31, “*...therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.*” This is a quote from Genesis 2:24, same passage which Jesus had quoted. And look where Paul goes with it next. Since we cannot understand the two becoming one flesh, because it is a mystery, Paul explains the mystery. Ephesians 5:32, “*This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*” This gives us

comfort as sinners saved by grace, that Christ will not divorce us! Christ will not give up on the church. Christ will not find something unacceptable in us and cast us away! What would become of us, if God were to deal with us the same way that the Pharisees in Mark 10 were advising husbands to deal with their wives? What prevents that from happening is Christ's faithfulness. He is faithful to us.

Concluding applications:

This is not a topical sermon on marriage or divorce. It was a sermon on one passage out of many passages. The issues can be complex.

1. Know God's design. *In the breakdown of society, we should grieve and be most concerned about the breakdown of marriage.* Don't tear apart what God has joined, and do not join together what God has kept separate. But people are doing this all the time! We do not excuse sin. Sometimes people are believing a lie that they will be happier by defying God's commands and going their own way. We should present the truth. We should work to prevent a breakup. We should all do our part to support marriages. We hold up the true teaching about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. We prepare people for marriage prior to their weddings. We sustain couples in their life-long marriages, at every step of the way. When a marriage starts to falter, we offer help from Scripture and wise counsel. When a marriage ends, we adjudicate the case from the many passages of Scripture. We protect children, the best we can.

2. Know the supply of God's grace is bigger than you think it is. *Because God forgives divorce for those who repent, we also must show compassion and forgiveness.* Jesus showed incredible and deep compassion, sympathy, and understanding for people whose lives have not maintained the highest standards and the best practices. In a perfect world, divorce would not happen. But this is why the Bible addresses the matter of marriage, and provides strength to keep marriages strong. The Bible also addresses divorce, and what is proper and improper. Know God's grace. We imitate God's compassion for those who are struggling and impacted by problems in the area of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

Story - a pastor was visiting with parents when they received an emotional telephone call from their recently married daughter. After several tense minutes on the phone, the mother told the father to pick up the extension. (This was before cell phones when homes had a few extension telephones. The Dad and the Mom were now on the phone with their recently married daughter.) The pastor waited in the other room, out of earshot of this phone call.

After only a few minutes, the father was finished talking on the phone and came back to sit and talk with the pastor.

The pastor asked out of concern, What is she calling about?

Well, she and her new husband, the newlyweds had had their first big fight.

The father explained, "Said she wanted to come home."

"What did you tell her?" the pastor asked.

"Told her she **was** home."

Know the supply of God's grace is bigger than you think it is.

2 Peter 1:3, God's "*...divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him...*"