

Pentwater Bible Church

Gospel of Mark

Message 38

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Christ and the Adulteress by Arent de Gelder Cir 1683

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Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Mark
Message Thirty-Eight

JESUS, THE PHARISEES AND DIVORCE

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JESUS AND THE ADULTERESS BY LUCAS CRANACH THE ELDER CIR 1532

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT DIVORCE

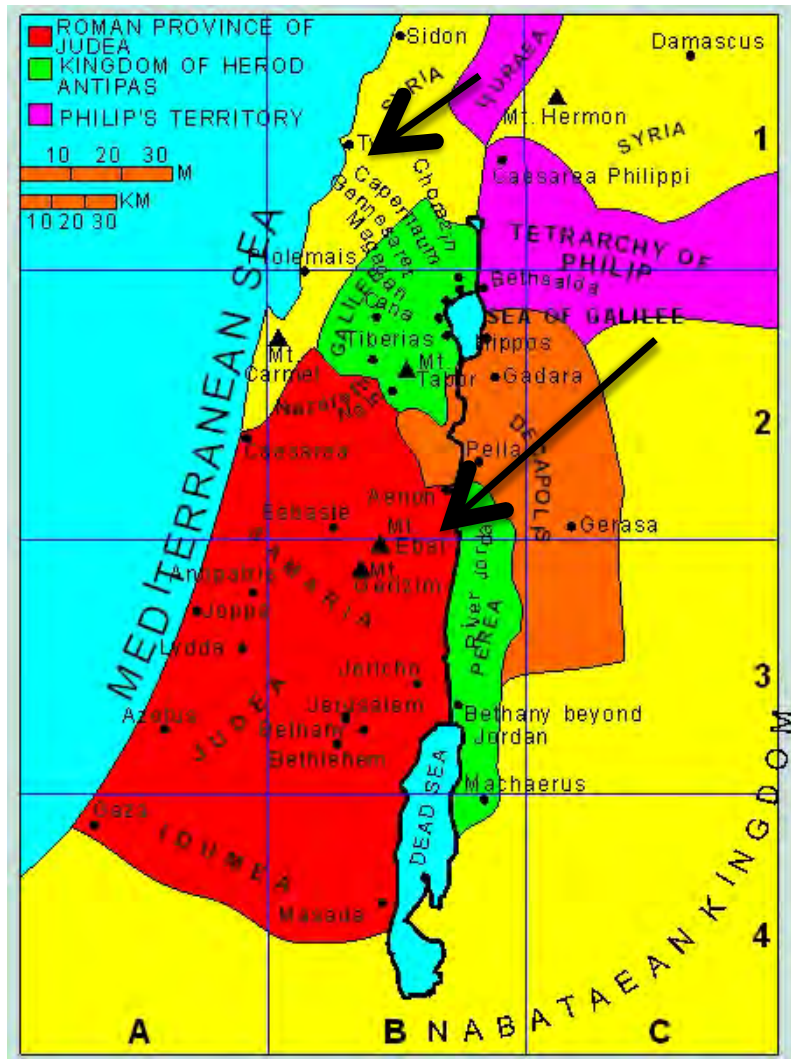
Mark 10:1-12

¹ And he rose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judea by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again. ² And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. ³ And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? ⁴ And they said, Moses [allowed] to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. ⁵ And Jesus answered and said unto them, For 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 cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; ⁸ and they [two] shall be one flesh: so then they are no more [two], but one flesh. ⁹ What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. ¹⁰ And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. ¹¹ And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. ¹² And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery (KJV).

JESUS RELOCATES AND TEACHES

Mark 10:1-12

¹ And he rose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judea by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again (KJV).



Map From <http://christianthinktank.com/giddygaddy.html>

Jesus and His disciples left Capernaum and were travelling south for His ultimate end, which is the crucifixion. He came into the region of Judea. This is a reference to the later Judean period (e.g. John 7:10-10:39 and Luke 10:1-13:21). Now this portion of His ministry refers to the farther side of the Jordan, which is Perea on the east side of the Jordan. Most of the activity during this period and location is recorded in Luke 13:22-19:28. John the Baptist had ministered there and the crowds had come to Jesus from this region earlier (Mark 3:8). These remarks of Mark are primarily directed to the end of Jesus' Perea ministry. The corresponding text covering this period that Mark here describes is also found in Luke 18:15-19:28.

THE PHARISEES TEST HIM

Mark 10:2

² *And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him (KJV).*

Mark does not specify what the nature of Jesus' teaching was on this occasion but it likely touched on some aspect of marriage and or divorce. The Pharisees who were continually trying to discredit Him asked Him a difficult question. This question if answered directly would offend some one or other. This was a very controversial issue in Jesus' time as it is in ours. If He supported divorce He would be sanctioning the Pharisee's position on this topic. If He chose sides in this issue some members of the crowd would be offended because they had used the Law to divorce their wives. If He spoke against divorce altogether this would be a violation of the Mosaic Law because Moses seemingly permitted it (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). The Pharisees thought they had Him between the proverbial rock and a hard place. The question had no easy answer because it was controversial and sure to offend. Rabbinic Judaism had nearly replaced the Tenach (Old Testament) teaching and this is where the controversy originated.

There had developed two schools of thought within the rabbinic community. One following a rabbi called Shammai who was a strict interpreter of the Law held that adultery alone was the only grounds for divorce. Whereas the Scribes who followed the liberal Hillel contended that a man could divorce his wife for any reason.

JESUS RESPONDS

Mark 10:3-5

³ *And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? ⁴ And they said, Moses [allowed] to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.*

⁵ *And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept (KJV).*

Jesus immediately directs the Pharisees to the Tenach and not to any rabbinic opinions by Hillel or Shammai. Jesus refers directly to Moses teaching in the Law.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

¹ *When a man taketh a wife, and marrieth her, then it shall be, if she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some unseemly thing in her, that he shall write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. ²And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. ³And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, who took her to be his wife; ⁴her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before Jehovah: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which Jehovah thy God giveth thee for an inheritance (ASV 1901).*

Jesus responds to the Pharisees with a question of clarification of the teaching of the Mosaic Law by asking them, "What did Moses command you?" They respond to this question by saying, "Moses [allowed] to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away." From the Pharisees response they must have thought He was strictly referring to the Deuteronomy passage of the Mosaic Law. However, Jesus asked about what *Moses said*.

Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible not just Deuteronomy. He was probably more of a redactor of the various earlier authors of Genesis (Adam, Enoch, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Jacob and Joseph) but he nevertheless had an intimate involvement with its assembly. Moses did write about the permission for divorce but he also wrote about what God's original plan was for the family before sin entered the world. Moses's injunction permitting divorce was an accommodation to the sin and frailty of mankind since the Fall. This resulted in a hardness of man's heart toward others and in this case a man's wife. On top of this the Pharisees were distorting what Moses allowed and the general environment of God's plan for accommodating the sins of mankind with protecting women from harmful marriages. In describing their distortion He refers to it by saying, "*For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.*" In other works Jesus is saying that the Pharisees wanted to divorce for any reason and used this passage in Deuteronomy as justification for getting rid of a wife for any reason.

Because the nature of sin since the Fall led to male dominance instead of the original plan of male leadership God was permitting a divorce to protect women in these situations. Sin made divorce inevitable so Moses allowed it but only with the proper procedure. Under Jewish Law only a man could initiate and complete the process. But to protect a woman so she would not be left alone in a vulnerable culture while living alone, divorce was allowed. The man could not just throw his wife out of the household. He had to issue a formal writ called a letter of divorce so she could remarry and reclaim her dowry, which was given to the man in the first marriage by her father. In other words he could not just take advantage of her for her money and belongings. She was protected through these civil rights and less vulnerable to abuse if the husband knew he could not keep her dowry and possessions.

The Pharisees knew this and sought to find ways around it. Hence the hardness of their hearts Jesus spoke of. Instead of this accommodation He directed their attention to the original plan of God for marriage. Divorce was not approved by God (Malachi 2:16) but allowed as a concession to their sinfulness toward their wives.

GOD ORIGINAL PLAN FOR MARRIAGE

Mark 10:6-9

⁶ *But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.*

⁷ *For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; ⁸ and they [two] shall be one flesh: so then they are no more [two], but one flesh. ⁹ What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder (KJV).*

Before the Fall and the resulting curse on the creation God's plan was for one man to leave his parents family and join to one woman as his wife thereby creating a new family of responsibility. He was not to remain connected to his family of origin as his primary family any more. God intended for him to create a new family of which he would be the leader. This new unit would be a union of mind spirit and flesh as the two joined together in an intimate closeness that could not be separated. The wife was not property but a equally created person who would be a helper to her man as he led the family. Divorce was not intended nor originally accommodated for the family unit. The Pharisees viewed divorce as a legal issue instead of a spiritual one. So they viewed the removal of a woman from the family as a mere transference of property. What Jesus is saying to them, "*What*

therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” is directly opposite to what they were doing to dissolve their marriages for convenience.

Going deeper into this issue of divorce we see two central but opposing aspects of marriage. *One*, God is saying that the marriage is permanent and no man can break it (put asunder), and *two* divorce is allowed. This almost seems to be contradictory. In fact Jesus goes on to say that divorce is permitted for fornication/adultery (Greek *pornea*) if at all. So even though God was permitting it under some circumstances He did not like it, as it was contrary to His plan for the family and society. As a result any divorce would be a troublesome endeavor with long lasting pain for the family breaking apart. Coming apart would be the minds emotions and bodies that had meshed into one according to the creation. This disruption of God’s plan would have significant repercussions and be harmful to all involved.

Aside from original plan in Genesis, God provided His Law through Moses, which was partially codified in the first ten of the 613 commandments in the Mosaic Law. He made this a covenant, which had penalties. He does not want any murdering, adultery, stealing, lying, or strongly desiring another’s possessions including his wife. Since marriage is a covenant made before God to become a family unit of one flesh, mind, spirit and set of emotions it is clear God does not want it violated. Violating the marriage covenant then is forsaking God not just the injured spouse. But if there is adultery, lying and other fractures in the covenant of marriage the covenant has been broken. Trust is gone; suspicion is now a constant thought of the faithfulness of the other partner. When this marriage covenant is broken God provides for dissolution of the marriage. He would prefer healing but in some cases this is unobtainable due to the hardness of some hearts.

JESUS AND ADULTERY

Mark 10:10-12

¹⁰ And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. ¹¹ And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. ¹² And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery (KJV).

Jesus was condemning the prevalent divorce practices in His day but did not prohibit a way out of a marriage. He knows that divorce is caused by and is sin because it violates the covenant of marriage. This does not mean that each divorce is sinful. When one spouse had been continually immoral or has breached the trust of the other this constitutes a fissure in the relationship and a break in the marriage covenant. If there is not healing through reconciliation divorce is recognized by God. If one spouse has been severely abused through lying, adultery etc. with no reconciliation possible due to hard heartedness divorce is not sinful. The hard heartedness toward a spouse in a marriage leads to abuse, adultery, lying and coveting. It is a wall that will not break so the marriage can be restored. On rare occasions when the hard hearts soften and forgiveness is genuinely sought the marriage trust and covenant might be restored. In this passage in the Matthew account the Lord clearly offers a valid reasons to dissolve a marriage.

Matthew 19:9

⁹ And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery (KJV)

Because the Lord adds fornication it is important to define the term and see what He is saying. His exposition of this issue to His apostles focuses on adultery because this is the primary reason for breaking the marriage covenant. It was in Jesus time as seen through the Pharisees and still is. A man or a woman wants another partner instead of the one they have. The level of pain this causes provides a legitimate reason for divorce. Here the Lord uses the word fornication (Greek *pornea*). In many instances this word used to denote sexual transgressions. However in *most* instances it is used symbolically meaning forsaking of God or following after idols (Isaiah 1:2; Jeremiah 2:20; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 1:2; 2:1-5; Jeremiah 3:8-9). Fornication also means to be unfaithful to the marriage commitment in all of its aspects not just sexual. Revelation, as well as the prophets, extends the meaning of fornication to include political and religious unfaithfulness (Revelation 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3; 19:2). So what Jesus is saying that if the marriage covenant of which God is a part has been broken this is legitimate ground for divorce. One other permission of divorce centers on the abandonment of a believing spouse by an unbelieving spouse (I Corinthians 7:15). It also provides for remarriage. If one has not been violated through *pornea* and just wants another spouse this is not a divinely sanctioned divorce. In any event God does not want a divorce because of the harm it causes the family.

The issue of divorce and remarriage continues to be hotly debated among evangelical Christians, and this has led to a great deal of confusion. Scripture supplies two allowances for believers to divorce their spouse, which are: being abandoned by an unbelieving spouse (I Corinthians 7:15), and unrepentant fornication by the spouse (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:4-9). It should be mentioned that although sexual immorality by one's spouse allows for divorce, it does not demand it (Matthew 18:21-22; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11; Ephesians 4:26-27, 29-32; 5:22-23). For a divorce under these two conditions it is not a sin and remarriage is not adultery.

Lastly if one has had an unbiblical divorce, it is sin. All sin can and will be forgiven if the sinner is genuinely repentant and asks God for forgiveness and the person that they sinned against in the marriage. Further if the divorce happened before the party was a believer they are forgiven, as they are for all other sins, past present and future when belief and repentance occurs. Upon a genuine profession of faith God Holy Spirit enters us and causes us to see out sins clearly and repent as well as asking for forgiveness.

JESUS TEACHES THAT ACCEPTING HIM IS LIKE A CHILDS TRUST

Please call or e-mail with any questions or comments

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