

Marriage & Divorce ... and **the Heart**

Mark 10:1-16

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based on messages by James Douthwaite and William Cwirla

This week, many of us received something for the very first time in history. What was it? An emergency warning text from the president, the first nationwide test of the government's Presidential Alert system - part of FEMA's efforts to alert citizens of an impending enemy attack or some other national crisis

Why? We want to be safe, don't we? So what do we do? We lock our doors at night. We buy cars with the latest safety features. We put our money in the bank or what we think are safe investments. We build a strong national defense. And we make *laws* - laws to protect us; laws so that we can protect ourselves. And we keep making laws and changing laws, strengthening some, weakening others, all so that we can be safe. Safe from evil. And yet, evil still comes upon us, doesn't it? The evil one is always at work - to devour, consume, and destroy you and everything near and dear to you.

Our text today touches on the most near and dear relationship God has established - marriage, the one flesh union of a man and a woman. Think about it. Each of us is pretty much a self-contained living being, eating, digesting, breathing, and moving on your own, capable by yourself of everything ... except for one thing: bringing new life into the world. You can't do that by yourself. Men and women were each given half of what is needed, and marriage was given to bring them together as one flesh, to produce and raise children, a family. "*To be fruitful and multiply*", is how God put it.

And so, we hear Jesus quoting from Genesis of the first marriage, how God formed a woman from the flesh and bone of Adam's side and then brought her to him in the first marriage ceremony. And what joy there was for them that day, as God gave them to one another! A joy repeated on wedding days still today. And God desired to protect that union and the families it produces, that it be a safe place. Safe from division. Safe from evil. What God has joined together let not man separate.

But separate is what's happened. This first gift of God after the creation of all that exists is, and has been, under attack. It didn't take long for Satan to divide what God had joined together, as Adam blamed his wife for all the trouble they had gotten into and even blamed God for giving him such a helper. The joy and unity they knew at first was now gone.

And it didn't take long after that for their children to follow in the footsteps of their parents, for brother to turn against brother, as Cain murdered his brother Abel, and then also in those first chapters of Genesis we read of rape, incest, multiple wives, and divorce. In a world infected and affected by evil, even marriages and families were not safe places anymore.

And we see it today, how the erosion of marriage and family has been going on for a long time. How the widespread *acceptance* of sexual activity *outside* of marriage has made marriage, to many, an unnecessary option - except to get desired tax breaks and rights afforded by the government. No fault, easy-to-get divorce has made marriage more like a *temporary* partnership than a lifelong union.

And who pays the price? Children pay the price, as more and more face the burden of not having mom and dad together or being raised without a mom or a dad in their lives. Many never make it that far, being ripped from their mother's wombs - *the* place that should be the safest place of all. And then, there's spousal and child abuse, pornography, fights, harsh words, lack of affection. Families divided, even while living under the same roof. As it was in the beginning, is today, and also was at the time of Jesus.

They too, turned to the *law*, just as we often turn to the law to fix the problems of sin. The Pharisees come up to Jesus and ask Him: *Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?* Well, Moses *allowed* it, Jesus replies, but that *wasn't* part of God's plan.

Take note of that answer. Often times, we think of the Law, and especially the Old Testament laws, as harsh, unyielding, and hopelessly rigid. But here the Law was relaxed a bit, softened. An *allowance* was made. For the truth is, it's not the *Law* that is unyielding and hopelessly rigid, it's our *heart* that is. Our heart, that won't yield. Our heart that won't forgive. Our heart hardened to pursue its own, selfish path, at the expense of *any* that would get in our way.

And so, God, in *mercy*, makes an allowance. Because God *knew* what we so often forget: that the *Law* is not the answer. The Law can't make us better. The Law can't create that *safe place* we desire and need. The Law is good, but sometimes the Law can be an idol too, if we look to *it*, instead of to Jesus, for the good, for the refuge, we need.

And so, when asked about marriage and divorce, what does Jesus do? He doesn't go back to Moses, back to the *Law*. He goes back to the beginning, to the Gospel, to marriage as the *joyful*, one flesh *gift* God created and gave. And then He protects the children too, taking them in His arms and blessing them. Because if there's going to be a safe place for our marriages, our families, and our friendships, it's in Jesus.

In Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels - to share our flesh and blood - to hang on the cross, forsaken by His Father, for our sins that He bore. Jesus came and took us as His Bride - that we first have a safe place *in Him* and His love and forgiveness.

And then, from within that love and forgiveness and safety, we begin to live a new life - not because of the Law, but because of the Gospel. We're safe in Jesus. Children safe in His arms. For in Him, the shattered bliss of Eden, is healed. Recreated. Our safe place restored.

John 10:10 *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come, that they may have life and have it abundantly.*

Satan's goal is disunity, disorder. To destroy the family, beginning with the very essence of who God made us - male and female. Beginning with the husband and wife union, leading to heartache and misery and disunity and disorder for children, for families, for neighborhoods, and communities, and schools, and churches, and on and on and on throughout all of society. *To steal and kill and destroy.* How? Focus his efforts on marriage, and the marriage bond, and all the subsequent damage will come to pass.

God's goal? Unity, peace, blessing - beginning with husband and wife - and on to children, and families, neighborhoods, communities, schools, churches, and on and on and on throughout all of society. *That they may have life and have it abundantly.*

They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

The Pharisees figured as long as you had your legal paperwork in order before you kicked your wife out of the house, then everything was okay as far as God was concerned. They were looking for loopholes, lawful ways to get rid of their wives without sinning against God.

Is it lawful? Is it okay for a man to divorce his wife? Matthew, giving further detail in his gospel, adds "... *for any and every reason.*" So, we're not talking about adultery or abuse or abandonment here.

The Pharisees come to Jesus with their question, as usual, to what? To test Him. So you already *know* the question is not an honest one. They want to *corner* Jesus, *trap* Him in His own words, get Him to take sides, label Him a "liberal" or a "conservative."

"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" What kind of question is that? Why are you asking? Are you trying to *point the finger* at the cause of your unhappiness? Are you looking to dump your wife for something better? Trying to justify your actions, and yourself? "Is it lawful to divorce my wife?" Why would you ask such a thing?

But Jesus gets to the real question, not just for the Pharisees, but for us as well. Not, "Is it lawful?", but "*What's going on in my heart?*" Jesus goes right to the heart of the matter. "*It was because of your hardness of heart Moses wrote you this commandment.*"

At its core, divorce, or any broken relationship, is really a matter of the heart, not paperwork. Why do we have many of the laws that we have? Because we don't always naturally do the right thing, the loving thing. At times, we need to be forced to do it. That's what the law does. It makes it "illegal" *not* to do the right thing. "You won't see that people keep what belongs to them? Then if you don't do the right thing and you take what doesn't belong to you, when you fail to do the loving thing for your neighbor and you steal from them instead, if you're not internally motivated to do the right thing, we'll externally motivate you by threatening you with jail."

What makes so many of our laws necessary? Hardness of heart. The law protected Israelite women from the callousness of their husbands. But in the hands of a legalist, the same protective law became a license for divorce; a license for self-centeredness; for hard-heartedness.

"It was not so from the beginning of creation." Jesus goes to the will of the Creator. In the beginning. Before sin fouled God's very good work. On the sixth day of creation, God made man out of the mud, and made a woman out of the man's side, and brought her to the man - as a gift. The greatest gift in all of the universe!

What's marriage all about? It's a gift from above. What's the basis for marriage? God's giving and man's receiving. *"A man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."*

Marriage is the only proper and healthy place for sexual love. Think of all the problems in our world, in our lives, all the heartache, that comes from sex *outside* of marriage. Only within marriage can two people be "naked and without shame" before one another and God. Marriage is intended to be a lifelong union. Only within a lifelong union can two people be completely open to each other without fear of one or the other leaving. And this one flesh union of marriage is God's doing; His gift.

In the end, Jesus never answers the Pharisees' question, does He? He didn't have to. *"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife [for any and every reason]?"* Why would you even ask? What's going on in your heart?

Jesus' disciples heard all of this. And they had questions too. They waited until they were in the house, alone with Jesus. And they ask Jesus about this again. This time Jesus delivers it straight and to the point, as he always does when He's alone with his disciples: "Anyone who divorces his wife AND (implied ... "with the selfish/hard-hearted intent to") marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband AND (with the selfish/heart-hearted intent to) marries another man, she commits adultery."

To divorce a spouse, in order to marry someone else is wrong. Period. It's to commit adultery. In Matthew 19, Jesus makes an exception where adultery has already occurred. Also, in 1 Corinthians 7 concerning abandonment, when your spouse leaves you. Or it may be an abusive situation, where you need to flee, for the safety of you and your children.

Like in Jesus' day, we live in a divorce-oriented world. Why? Part of the reason is because of what's going on in our hearts. Hearts turned inward instead of turned upward to God in worship and outward in loving service toward others. The real question isn't, "Is it lawful?", but "What's going on in my heart?"

Divorce does happen, back in Moses' day, back in Jesus' day, in our day. We need to confess it, and be forgiven. Whenever divorce happens, sin is involved. If there were no sin between husband and wife, there would be no divorce. The danger is that hardened hearts, tend to become calloused toward God. Loopholes in the Law won't help the hurt either. They just contribute to the hardening.

Jesus gave His life for us all - the married, the single, the divorced, the little children. He reaches out in mercy to a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, five times married and living with number six. He defends a woman caught in adultery from her stone-throwing accusers and He forgives her. He bore our adulteries on the cross. He became the adulterer in our place, so that, in Him, we might become His righteousness.

As one person puts it, "If you are married, let Jesus be in the middle of your marriage. He is the Source of forgiveness between husband and wife. He must get between husband and wife to soften their hearts, to sweep away their sins, to bind them together as one flesh. As sinners we dare not deal directly with one another. We would destroy one another. Jesus must mediate, get between us, working reconciliation and peace. Only through Jesus can we forgive one another. Only through Jesus can husbands and wives receive each other as gifts from God. Only through Jesus can two become one flesh." (Cwirila)

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