

God's Design for Marriage
Mark 10:1-12; August 1, 2021

Introduction:

I have a very difficult task today. In our passage today, Jesus teaches on marriage, divorce and remarriage. It's difficult on a three specific fronts:

1. There is not unanimous agreement regarding what the Bible teaches about divorce and remarriage. Exegetically, it's a hard topic. As a result, at times I'm going to present the range of possible interpretations while also humbly sharing where I personally stand today.

2. Divorce has probably impacted many if not most of us in some very real and hard ways.

- Maybe your parents were divorced or are going through a divorce.
- Maybe you are going through a divorce or have been through a divorce.
- Many of you are or have experienced excruciating or "horrific" pain: emotional, relational, physical, spiritual, financial.
- Please don't check out on me. My goal is not to crush you. That's what Satan wants to do. My hope is, as one author says, "to mingle the call to obedience with the tears of compassion" (Sam Storms) and invite you to experience the freedom and restoration that is available in Jesus.

3. Culturally, many people, including followers of Jesus, are very casual about marriage, divorce and remarriage.

- In fact, many of the younger generation are avoiding marriage altogether and would rather just live together.

We need to hear from God on how to think about these issues. The cost of discipleship means following Jesus in all of life, including marriage, divorce and remarriage.

Read Mark 10:1-12

Context (1-2)

This whole interaction is kicked off by a question from the Pharisees who were *testing* Jesus.

- The Pharisees wanted to demolish Jesus' position and cause him to compromise the authority of the Law

There were two competing schools of thought in Jesus' day (see *m. Git.* 9:10):

- Shammai
 - The only ground for divorce was adultery (sexual immorality).
- Hillel
 - Divorce could be granted for "any indecency."
 - The Pharisees, for the most part, followed this school.

- With this frame of thought, someone could be divorced for almost anything.
- This is really what the question is about and the text in Matthew 19 makes this clear:

“Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” (Matthew 19:3, ESV)

- Their question is aimed in the wrong direction. It’s as if they’re more interested in figuring out what they can get away with and still please God.
 - How close can I get to the line without going over it?
 - How close can I get to the fire without being burned?
 - It’s not that one can’t ask the question about divorce, it’s just that often the question can be framed with a focus in the wrong direction.

Jesus asks: *“What did Moses command you? (3)”*

- Sidebar: Jesus’ authority was the Word of God.
 - As you wrestle through these very hard questions, you must honestly ask: what’s the authority in my life? What’s driving my decision making?
 - Reason, experience, peer pressure, culture, the Bible.

The Pharisees’ response: *Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away (4).*

- This certificate guaranteed that the divorcee had the right to remarry another man if she chose. It safeguarded the woman.
- Just to be explicit: it did not encourage or command divorce but was an attempt to limit its worst consequences for women.

Jesus’ response to the Pharisees’ response (5-6):

- Jesus quotes Genesis 1:27 and 2:24.

Transition: The Pharisees wanted to talk about divorce but Jesus wanted to talk about God’s design so he goes to the beginning. The Pharisees’ text was a text of concession, Jesus’ was a text of intention.

What does this passage teach us about marriage, divorce and remarriage?

1. God’s design for marriage is one male and one female becoming one for life (6-9).

- We are not just being humans, we are created male and female. Maleness and femaleness are a part of God’s creative will and foundational for marriage.
- Two become one - this is fascinating.
- If you had to answer the Pharisees’ initial question based on Jesus’ response, what would you say the answer is? No.
- Sidebar: What does oneness in marriage practically look like?

- You are still two different people. You have different personalities, gifts, strengths, etc.
- What I encourage couples whom I do pre-marital counseling for is to as much as possible integrate and combine your lives.
- Financially: it's not my money and your money and my income and your income, it's our money and our income. It's not, you buy this and I'll buy that. It's, we will buy this.
- I want to make it as hard as possible to separate our lives. Some couples are setting themselves up for divorce from the get go because they are not committed to a one flesh marriage.

Why did God design marriage, and in particular, marriage in this way?

- Paul, in Ephesians 5:31, quotes Genesis 2:24 and then he says, "This mystery is profound." He calls marriage a "mystery."

What's a mystery?

- It is something that was hidden for a season of time (in this case, the OT) but has now been revealed (in this case, with the coming of Jesus, and explicitly here in Ephesians 5).

What was hidden that has now been revealed?

- One scholar describes it this way: "As God made man in his own image, so he made marriage in the image of his own eternal marriage with his people" (Geoffrey Bromiley, *God and Marriage*, 43).
- Or, as another scholar puts it: "Marriage is meant to be a living drama of the covenant-keeping love between Christ and the church" (Piper, 75).
- Another way to say this is that marriage is about displaying the glory and beauty of the gospel.

There are a number of key implications of this:

- Marriage is not an afterthought. God created and designed marriage knowing already about his plan of redemption to save humans through Jesus Christ.
- Marriage to Jesus should be our ultimate pursuit. There will be no human marriage after death (cf. Matt. 22:30; Mk. 12:25) because the shadow of our marriages gives way to the true reality of Christ and his church, the bride. Those who trust in Christ will be married to him for all eternity. Human marriage is temporary. Relationship to Jesus is ultimate.
- Marriage is meant to reflect something about the nature of God. The more we learn about how God relates to us, the more we learn how we're to relate to our spouses.
 - Think about the unconditional love of God and the faithfulness of God.
 - What grounds would ever cause God to divorce you?

For those who have the desire for marriage (singleness is a great gift from God):

- Marriage shouldn't be entered into lightly.
- Marry someone who is in love with Jesus (not someone who says they are a Christian).
- Live in community. Invite your pastors, your CG leaders, your friends to give honest

feedback on your relationship before you commit to marriage.

2. Divorce is the negative result of sin and living in a fallen world (3-5, 10-12).

Jesus says, “Because of your hardness of heart.”

- This statement in Matthew rings in your ears.
- In Matthew 18, Jesus tells the parable of the unforgiving servant:
 - Peter: how many times must I forgive my brother?
 - Jesus: 77 times or 70 x 7.
 - A king forgives a servant who owes him 10,000 talents
 - 20 years’ wages x 10,000
 - 50k x 20 = 1 million
 - 1 million x 10,000 = IDK
 - The point: He could never pay this debt back.
 - The servant refused to forgive his fellow servant 100 denarii
 - Denarii = 1 days’ wage.
 - \$150 x 100 = \$15,000.
 - The king has him throw in jail until he can pay it all back.

“So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” (Matthew 18:35, ESV)

Our own sin and sin against us.

- Marriage is hard. You must daily deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus.
- Marriage is a call to be last of all and servant of all.
- Because you are one flesh, you treat your wife like you treat yourself (see Eph. 5:25ff).
- Marriages don’t just explode over night. Affairs don’t typically just happen all of a sudden. There’s a slow crumbling of the foundation, trust broken here and there, bitterness here and there, lack of forgiveness here and there.
- God’s desire for troubled marriages is always reconciliation.

Are there biblical grounds for divorce?

- We can’t just answer this question based on Mark 10 because there are other key texts that speak about marriage and divorce.

Three Major Views on Divorce and Remarriage (among those who accept the full authority of the Bible):

1. Divorce is never permitted for any reason (my personal lean).

- There’s no doubt that Jesus’ teaching was regarded as extremely strict by everyone who heard it.
 - The disciples ask to speak with him again.

- Check out the disciples' response in Matthew 19:10

“The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.””
(Matthew 19:10, ESV)

- Romans 7:1-3 seems to reinforce that only death severs the marriage bond.

2. Divorce is permitted but remarriage is not allowed.

- From Mark, divorce isn't what causes one to commit adultery, but rather remarrying is what causes one to commit adultery.
- Remarriage is not commanded anywhere.

“To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.” (1 Corinthians 7:10–11, ESV)

- Separation can be wise sometimes.

3. Divorce is permitted and remarriage to a believer is granted to the innocent party.

- This is an argument primarily from silence. The logic is that if God grants divorce to the innocent party then he would also grant permission to remarry.

When might divorce be permitted?

- Adultery (some say this is the only exception).

“And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” (Matthew 19:9, ESV)

- Why is it only mentioned in Matthew?
 - Solution: it was conceded by all Jews and therefore implied in Jesus' response in Mark and Luke.
- How does position #1 explain this verse?
 - Solution: “Sexual immorality” is to be understood within a Jewish betrothal context, similar to an engagement. Divorce is allowed only for unfaithfulness in the betrothal period. The reason it's missing from Mark and Luke is because they were writing to a non-Jewish audience.
- Desertion of an unbeliever.

“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.” (1 Corinthians 7:15, ESV)

- Some conclude that “is not enslaved” or “not bound” means you are free not only to divorce but to remarry. It could mean any of the above three possibilities.
- Abuse would fall under this category (physical, verbal, emotional, sexual):
 - Your partner could treat you such that you are forced to leave the home (this is forced abandonment).
 - If you ever feel unsafe in your home or if you spouse becomes violent, please don’t hesitate to call 911 and leave.
 - If you feel unable to leave the house or are not ready to talk to someone you know, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-7233).
 - Please reach out for help, either with a pastor, CG leader, or trusted friend.
 - There is a difference between having a heart posture willing to forgive someone and remaining in a place of abuse.
- If the divorce was pre-conversion (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17).

If you divorced your spouse on unbiblical grounds and you have not remarried, what should you do?

- You can stay single
- You can be reconciled.

Before you consider divorce:

- Here these words from Laura Baxter, from her article, “Take It from Me: Don’t Get a Divorce.” She says, “I was divorced after three children and 10 years of marriage. Since that time, almost two decades ago, I have counseled many women weathering divorce and its aftermath. I can tell you confidently that divorce is worse than you think. If you go through with divorce, you will experience extreme emotional distress, including sadness, anger, and shame. You will feel alone. Conflict with your husband will probably accelerate, pulling friends and family into the vortex. And you will lose any semblance of control over your life.” She continues, “I urge you, in the power Christ provides, to fight tirelessly for your marriage. Trust that God has given you all the resources you need to be faithful.” Further, “For yourself, your family, and the gospel, I pray you will firmly and finally put all thought of divorce behind you. Take up your cross and follow Christ in all things. He promises you will find abundant life.”
- Just because you *can* biblically divorce your spouse doesn’t mean you *should*.
- Search your heart: do you want a divorce so that you don’t have to address areas of sin and weaknesses in your own life?
- Consider the cost and pain of divorce:
 - Personal
 - Familial (children)
 - Financial
- Live in community. Invite people into your life who will ask the hard questions. Reach

out to a pastor, a Community Group leader, a trusted follower of Jesus who will speak the truth in love.

Before you consider remarriage:

- Don't make a bad decision flowing from hurt and pain. The last thing you need to do is remarry the wrong person or for the wrong reasons. Another marriage can't heal your heart. Only God can do that.
- Spend adequate time reflecting and evaluating. What do you need to learn or change so that this doesn't happen again.
- Live in community. Invite people into your life who will ask the hard questions.

The Point: Make Jesus the Ultimate Marriage of Your Life

Jesus is not trying to crush you with this teaching. But he is clarifying the call to discipleship. Denying yourself, taking up your cross and following Jesus also means doing all of that in your marriage.

- Jesus is your perfect example for how to love and pursue your spouse.
- Jesus empowers you by his Holy Spirit to help you display the glory of God in your marriage.

But this same Jesus who commands you to live very radically in your marriage also shed his blood to form a new covenant to pay for every single one of your sins. Jesus says in Mark 3:28,

“Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter,” (Mark 3:28, ESV).

So if you've been part of an unbiblical divorce. If you have remarried. What should you do now?

- Confess and repent of your sins and receive the forgiveness that has been bought for you at the cross.
- Jesus wants you to experience the liberating power of forgiveness.
- There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.
- Unbiblical divorce and remarriage is not the unforgivable sin (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11).
- Take your bitterness to Jesus.
 - Craig Luekens asks, “How could I harbor bitterness when the holy and innocent One cried out on the cross, ‘Father forgive them, for they know not what they do?’”
- You can't change the past. You can commit to glorify God with what's ahead.

If you are struggling with your marriage or a previous divorce, please reach out. No one should walk through difficult marriage or divorce alone. Fight the temptation to think you are “bothering” a pastor or a leader. This is what family does.