

THE TRUTH ABOUT DIVORCE

Mark 10:1-11

Introduction:

This morning we come to one of the most contentious passages in the book of Mark. Divorce... Our society is littered with the consequences of broken marriages... and the church is little different from the non-Christian realm when it comes to the statistics of divorce. Possibly one difference that affects the statistics is that outside of the church, fewer people are bothering to get married in the first place... but that is another subject.

This morning we are going to tackle this passage from Mark 10 and look at what God has to say about the subject of divorce. At the outset, a disclaimer: It is not my intent to condemn or chastise anyone here this morning. If you have a divorce in your past, or you have family members in this situation, I am not here to put some kind of guilt trip on you. I want to assure you that God is also a God of grace and forgiveness, and that is something we all need. I intend to address briefly, later on.

So, what is God's opinion about divorce? Well, the short answer is found in the book of Malachi – 2:16 – "I hate divorce." *Go to Malachi and read 2:13-16 – explain v. 16 textual difficulty.* The NIV says, "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. *So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.*

What was happening when Malachi issued this ultimatum from God? Go to Nehemiah – same time period as Malachi – after the exile, people back in the land, temple rebuilt, walls rebuilt. Nehemiah's reforms – chapter 13 – re-established the worship of God, dealt with the distribution of offerings for the priesthood, merchandising on the Sabbath, and other aspects of life in Jerusalem.

Now look at vv. 23ff – read vv. 23-27. The people were marrying foreign women. More than that, they were divorcing their Jewish wives in order to marry these beautiful foreign women they saw – trading for a

newer model. That is why Malachi said you have been faithless to the wife of your youth. The intermarrying with foreign wives was forbidden because of God's concern for the purity of the Messianic line. But even more, divorcing a wife in order to marry another is clearly condemned by God through the prophet Malachi.

So, that is a long explanation for the short answer – God hates divorce. Now let's go back to the New Testament to see the question, as it is presented in our text, and see how Jesus dealt with it.

We read this account from the book of Mark a few minutes ago. Before we go into it, I would like to read the same account from the book of Matthew as he records this conversation just a bit differently. Perhaps as we put the two together we get a fuller picture of what Jesus said on this occasion regarding divorce. *Read Matthew 19:1-12.*

Now, back to Mark... **He left there** – Capernaum, Galilee. He entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan – known as Perea – *describe.* Jesus actually spent the next several months there teaching and healing as he made his way toward Jerusalem.

The Pharisees' question – Before we go look at the question, there is one other thing to keep in mind. The Pharisees were not looking for information. As always, their questions were designed to trap Jesus, to paint him into a corner that He can't talk himself out of.

So, what is the question - "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" Matthew adds, "...for any reason (cause)?" What were they getting at in this question? Pastor Alan Carr puts it very well. He says:

To understand the nature of their attack, we need to first understand the state of marriage in Israel in that day. Marriages in ancient Israel were not usually based on love. In fact, the idea of romantic love being the basis for a marriage would have been laughable in that day. Men took wives for convenience. Marriage was the only lawful way for a man to satisfy his sexual appetite. When a man married a woman, he got a sexual partner, and as a bonus, he got someone to clean his house, cook his meals, wash his clothes and give birth to his children. Women were viewed as possessions that could be acquired and abandoned as the needs and desires of the husband changed.

As to the question of divorce, in Jesus's day there were two main schools of thought, led or promoted by two leading rabbis.

One of these rabbis was a man named Shammai. He taught that the only lawful reason a divorce could be granted was for adultery. The teachings of Shammai were followed by a small minority of the population and the religious leaders. The problem with this view is that according to the Law of Moses, the penalty for adultery was stoning.

The other rabbi was a man named Hillel. Hillel held a very liberal view of divorce. He taught that a man could divorce his wife for any reason at all. If she took down her hair in public; if she was seen talking to another man; if she ruined a meal by burning the food or by putting too much salt into it; if she spoke evil of her mother-in-law; if she was infertile; even if her husband saw a woman he thought was prettier, she could be divorced. It is easy to see why this was the most popular view

So, how did Jesus respond? As he often did, He responded to their question with a question – *“What did Moses command you?”* Let cut through all the rhetoric, put aside the traditions, get past all the rabbinic teaching and get back to the Scriptures.

Their response – v. 4. Matthew uses the word “command.”

Command of Moses Regarding Divorce

Let's consider this issue for a moment. Where did they get this teaching of Moses – turn to Deuteronomy 24 – the only place where Moses speaks about divorce apart from 2 references in Deut. 22 where men were specifically forbidden to divorce. But Deut. 24 is certainly what they were thinking of... *read vv. 1-4.*

Do you see a command there to divorce, for any reason, and send her away? Is there a permission given? No, it is a recognition that some will find fault and will divorce. But that is not the command. The only command is that if you do divorce your wife, and she remarries and then something happens to that marriage, you can't take her back as your wife a second time...

No, divorce was only permitted because the hardness of people's hearts – Mark 10:5 – because you are so hard-hearted toward God and

one another, some of you are going to dismiss your wife or husband, and dissolve your marriage, so here is the rule: If you do, and she remarries, there is no going back.

The Foundations of Marriage

Jesus goes on to make it clear that this was never intended in God's plan. Divorce only came about because people were unwilling to walk in God's way. In vv. 6-9 Jesus gives us 4 reasons why divorce does not fit with God's plan and why, in His eyes, it is unlawful. (*Basic ideas taken from John MacArthur*)

1. First, there is the matter of what marriage is – v. 6 – Matthew adds, “Have you not read...” – *read v. 6.* When God created human beings in the beginning, he made a man and a woman. The text is clear – one man, one woman, for the purpose of marriage (implied in the next verse). There is no room for polygamy, and there is no room for divorce. God made one man and one woman, made for each other and no one else. Adam could not discard Eve and take someone else. There was no one else. From the beginning marriage was meant to be one man, one woman bound together for life. That is what marriage is.
2. Then there is the strength of the marriage – v. 7. This is the God-ordained view of marriage. It is an independent strong union. You leave father and mother. You break the prior family bond, and you are joined to and hold fast to your wife. The idea of the word used here is “glue”. You're literally stuck together. It is not a temporary arrangement or a trial. You are glued together. And the word also carries the idea of pursuing hard after. It is two people unbreakably connected, glued together and pursuing hard after each other to be united in mind and will and spirit and body and emotion.
3. Third, a man and woman, in marriage, become one flesh – v. 8. This takes the idea of leaving your family and cleaving to its extreme. The two become one. In the consummation of a marriage, a man and woman are joined together in unity, becoming one, physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. You can't divide one. One is the indivisible number. You cannot divide one without destroying it – tearing it apart.

4. The fourth reason why God hates divorce and that is because marriage is His own work – v. 9. I quote here directly from John MacArthur – he says:

“Marriage is a work of God. We’re not talking about Christian marriage. We’re just talking about marriage. Marriage is a work of God, not only as an institution, but every marriage is a work of God. Every uniting of two people is a work of God because within the purpose of God’s sovereign plan, the life that comes out of that union has been foreordained unto divine ends... Every marriage is an act of God by which He bestows upon a man and a woman the common grace of marriage and children. It’s an act of God. He puts two people together. And out of those two come the offspring who have been foreordained to His own ends.”

So, to break up a marriage, any marriage, your own or someone else’s, is to undo a work of God. It is dividing and tearing apart something which is indivisible, intended to be a permanent union, a covenant relationship.

Then why is it that divorce is so rampant, so common – not only in today’s society, but throughout history? Because we are all sinners. Unfortunately, sin has ruined everything God created, even the institution of marriage. The sad truth is, people get married and people get divorced too. But that is not what God intended.

Conclusion

There is so much more that could, and probably should, be said on this subject, but we don’t have time. Let me just wrap this up by addressing the question of those who may find themselves in this situation. If you have, or someone you love has a divorce in the past, what can you do?

First, there is nothing you can do to change the past. And living in continual guilt or feelings of failure cannot change history. But, faithfully following Jesus Christ today can change the future. I would like to read a quote from Pastor Alan Carr, who I think says it very well:

“If you are divorced, or if you are divorced and remarried, then you need to know that you are not a second-class believer. I

know there are some people who treat the victims of divorce as though they had the plague. I know that [people] have placed a lot of restrictions on what you can and cannot do in the church. I also know that most of those restrictions are just legalism and have no basis in scripture. If you have been divorced, you should also bow before the Lord. You need to ask Him to help you be effective in whatever marital state you find yourself today.”

I think that sums it up well. Perhaps there is sin that needs to be confessed; perhaps there are relationships that need to be restored. But wherever you find yourself today, seek God and let Him guide you and direct your life and ministry. You can’t change the past. But you can move forward, building your life today on the unchanging truth of God’s Word. And God can use you in wonderful ways if you will let Him.

And for those of you who do not find yourself in this position, a few thoughts and suggestions:

1. Thank God for your marriage. Thank Him that He has been faithful and has kept you faithful to your marriage vows.
2. Work on your marriage and ask God how you can make your marriage even stronger.
3. Reach out in love to those who are struggling, not judging, but offering forgiveness and acceptance.

Prayer