

NCBC Youth Group
March 8, 2020 | Lord's Table

LESSON ON DIVORCE AND MARRIAGE
MARK 10:1-12

Introduction

Jesus and His disciples headed south from Galilee. His destination is Jerusalem, where He will be betrayed, arrested, and crucified. Our passage opens by telling us Jesus went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. Mark and Matthew do not record Jesus' ministry in Judea—Luke and John record this—instead, Mark and Matthew skip directly to Jesus' ministry in the region beyond the Jordan. This region is called Perea.

Once there, the scene is familiar: Large crowds gathered around Him,¹ He taught them, He healed them,² and the Pharisees were present. The Pharisees followed Jesus and on several recorded occasions, publicly confronted Jesus. They weren't following Jesus to learn from Him. They followed Him for the purpose of deviously trying to trap Him or find ways to destroy Him. They had rejected Jesus very early on. In Mark 3:6, after several confrontations early in Jesus' ministry, they sought to destroy Jesus. We're now in Mark 10, and they are still following Jesus, trying to destroy Him.

In our text today, Jesus uses the confrontation with Pharisees to teach the disciples a lesson on divorce and marriage. The Bible is very clear on divorce and marriage, even in the Old Testament, but the truth regarding divorce and marriage had been distorted by the Rabbis that Jesus had to expose the errors and clarify the truths.

The Test

The Pharisees came up to Jesus in verse 2, and they asked Him a question. Their motive was not to get clarification but to test Him. They're trying to trap Him. This is their question: Verse 2, "Whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife." Matthew 19:3 records the question this way, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" Did you get that? Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all.

Now, of all the questions, why did they ask Him this question and how is it intended to trap Him? If we go back to the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, we find that God says, "I hate divorce" (Malachi 2:16). Malachi was written 400 years before Christ came. In between those 400 years, divorce had become very common and popular. In Jesus' days,

¹ Matthew 19:2 adds "large" crowds followed Him.

² Matthew 19:2 adds the healing ministry.

people divorced for just about any reason. That's why the Pharisees asked if it was lawful to divorce for any reason.

Even though God hated divorce and that is recorded in the Scriptures, people twisted the Scripture and made it easy to divorce. People depended on the teachings of the Rabbis. It bears a lot of similarity to the Roman Catholic Church, where people follow the teachings of the pope and the church rather than holding to Scripture as their sole authority. You always get in trouble when you follow man-made doctrines.

The Rabbis taught that you could divorce for just about any reason. They found a verse in the Bible that in their minds supports divorce. They took that verse and misinterpreted it for their own benefit. In Mark 10:3, Jesus knew their misinterpretation of the Bible, so He asked them, "What did Moses command you?" He goes straight to the text in question, the very text they distorted.

The Pharisees answer in Mark 10:4, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." That's quoted from Deuteronomy 24:1, which says, "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that 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 from his house."

The question is: How do you interpret "indecency"? This is how one of the prominent Rabbis, Rabbi Hillel, interpreted that: "According to that view, a man was permitted to divorce his wife for anything she did that displeased him, even such trivial matters as burning his dinner, allowing someone to see her ankles, letting her hair down, making a negative comment about her mother-in-law, or if all else failed, because he found someone else that he preferred to her."³

Basically, the view of the day was to abandon what Scripture teaches and follow a man-made doctrine on divorce and marriage. With that background in mind, it's easy to understand why the Pharisees used this question to try to trap Jesus. Divorce was popular among the people, and the Pharisees probably knew what the Scriptures taught on divorce and that Jesus would not uphold the popular view of divorce. You see, Jesus was very popular at this time—large crowds followed Him—but perhaps Jesus would become unpopular if He told the crowd the truth about divorce. After all, there was the potential to

³ John MacArthur, *Mark 9-16 The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 54.

upset a lot of people who not only upheld the rabbinic teachings of divorce, many people probably divorced their wives on the grounds of the rabbinic teachings.

The second reason is that Jesus is now in Perea, which is under the control of Herod Antipas. You might remember in Mark 6, that Herod Antipas beheaded John the Baptist because John told Herod “it is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife” (6:18). Herod Antipas divorced his wife to marry his brother’s divorced wife, and John told them it was not lawful. Notice that John the Baptist says, “your brother’s wife.” John recognized that it was not a legitimate marriage and would not refer to her as his wife.

Perhaps the Pharisees thought that if they can get Jesus to talk about His views, Herod would kill Him too. So, this question regarding divorce is all a trap. They didn’t care what God thinks about divorce or marriage, they just wanted to kill Jesus.

The Truth

Regardless of their evil motives to trap Jesus, Jesus turns this into a lesson on divorce and marriage for His disciples. Just like all the other lessons He’s taught them, this is important because they need to know the truth about divorce and marriage in a society where the prevailing opinion is errant.

Jesus responds in Mark 10:5, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.” Listen, if it is wrong to divorce for the reasons listed by the rabbis, why did Moses permit divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1? The reason divorce is permitted is because of their hardness of heart. There were some situations where divorce is the lesser evil, and that’s why under those circumstances, divorce is permitted.

But, divorce is not God’s intention, and Malachi 2:16 stated that God hates divorce. In verse 6, Jesus reaches all the way back to creation: “But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. [7] For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, [8] and the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh.’ [9] What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” By going back to creation it shows that God has always intended marriage to be between one man, one woman, and for their entire lives. Look at verse 8, “The two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh.” One is an indivisible number, and the marriage bond is not meant to be broken.

Divorce goes against His design. But if God designed marriage for life, and divorce goes against that design, why is there divorce? That can be answered by the fall in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve sinned, and sin entered the world. The man and the woman were cursed.

God's design was that the wife will graciously and willingly submit to the husband, and the husband will compassionately lead and care for his wife. However, when sin entered the world, instead of graciously and willingly submitting to the husband, the wife seeks to dominate her husband. The husband, instead of compassionately caring for his wife, seeks to over-dominate her. Obviously, this brings trouble, and when that trouble escalates to the point where the two people cannot stand each other anymore, separation and divorce results.

So, the question is: Under what circumstances is divorce permissible? If you look at verse 10-12, Jesus answers that question. Verse 11, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; [12] and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery." Matthew 19:9, "Whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." Here, Jesus clarifies Deuteronomy 24:1. Permission to divorce comes when one spouse commits adultery. In that case, the innocent spouse has the freedom to remarry.

Let me give you an illustration of this. In Matthew 1, the account of the birth of Jesus, we know that Mary was pregnant, but not by Joseph. The natural explanation is that she is pregnant by another man, and that she had committed adultery and infidelity. Matthew 1:19 says, "Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly." Adultery was grounds for divorce.

The New Testament also lists another permissible reason for divorce, and that is found in 1 Corinthians 7:15. If one of the spouses is not a believer, and they choose to divorce the believing spouse, that is also grounds for divorce. In that case, the believing spouse is free to remarry. Outside of these two exceptions—adultery and an unbelieving spouse divorcing a believing spouse—remarriage constitutes adultery.

Conclusion

As we conclude, I want to give you another illustration of a time where divorce was permitted, but this was an extremely unusual situation. In Deuteronomy 7:1-4, God instructed the Israelites that when they entered the promised land, they were prohibited from intermarrying with the people whom they conquered. Why? Because "they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods" (7:4). But, some time after that, we find that the people did exactly that. In Ezra 9:1-2, the people were guilty of intermarrying with the people of the land, disobeying God's command in Deuteronomy. The issue here is

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idolatry. God's prohibition of intermarriage was given to protect the people from idolatry, from turning away from God when they marry people who worship other gods.

What resulted? Ezra 10:3, "So now let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law." What happened? Mass divorce. In this instance, idolatry was a far greater evil than divorce. Divorce was the lesser evil.

Let us remember that marriage is a serious thing in God's eyes, and as Christians, we need to take it seriously as well.