

Jason Upchurch - Mark 10:1-12 - The Good News Hates Divorce - Part 2

Alright we are back in this section on divorce. If you remember from last time, after our long introduction, what we find out here is that Jesus is in the exact same geographical spot that John the Baptist was when he was arrested and later beheaded.

He was arrested and killed because he kept telling Herod Antipas and his new wife, Herodias, that their marriage was unlawful. Herodias had been married to Phillip but divorced him and married his brother Antipas. John kept preaching that that was unlawful which irritated Antipas and eventually landed him in jail and later killed.

So the Pharisees think maybe they can get Jesus executed. He's in the same place, Antipas is intolerant to preaching on divorce so they ask him the question and Jesus gives them a straight answer. Jesus is bold about God's view of marriage, and we should be too. We can't play coy when someone asks us the hard questions. We have to be willing to accept the outcome no matter what comes.

So the big story here is really the boldness of Jesus in proclaiming these truths despite the very real danger of execution.

This morning I want to focus on the content of what Jesus says. Do not get divorced. Now, I think it's helpful for us to say at the outset that divorce is not the unpardonable sin. While at the same time affirming that it is a sin. It's like any other sin.

Paul was a murderer, David an adulterer, Matthew was a thief, Jacob a liar, Abraham a coward. Those are all sins. Sins for which Christ died. Nevertheless, they are sins and we can preach against them. In fact, all of those guys would preach against those sins. That's what we do when we're saved. We change our mind about the sins we've committed and preach against the very things we need saved from.

So there is forgiveness for divorce. But just like any sin it's not something we advocate or let pass lightly. Like any other sin, we would strongly preach against it.

I believe that if someone is remarried they are in a new covenant of marriage. They shouldn't have made that covenant. But they're not in perpetual sin. They're not in perpetual adultery. They're also not polygamists.

But they have made a new covenant and Jesus recognizes the legitimacy of that covenant.

Remember that the woman at the well in **John 4** had 5 husbands. Literally Jesus says, "you have had five husbands." Now, we don't know how all of those ended but the fact that she's out gathering water by herself in the middle of the day makes it very likely that she's a disreputable woman. That she's committed adultery many times,

But the implication of Jesus's words is that all five of the marriages were legitimate marriages. And, if you remember, he calls her out for not being married: "And the man you are with is not your husband." She's playing house, committing adultery and everyone knows it. The first five marriages were recognized as marriages, and her current situation is sinful.

So someone who gets divorced and remarried is in a legitimate marriage but they've sinned to get there. And we should never take that lightly, even if later on the second marriage is a blessing.

So the big takeaway here is that divorce is wrong and remarriage is wrong. The only allowance for remarriage in the Bible is if the spouse dies because the marriage covenant is "til death do us part."

Side: we were watching a movie last night and there was a shotgun marriage and the part of wedding they showed was the preacher urging the couple that their union was "dissolved only by death." I just about choked on my ice cream, when's the last time you heard Hollywood say something that radical?

So I want to make just 3 simple observations.

1) Moses is against divorce. **Read 2-5**

So what does Moses have to say about marriage and divorce? Remember the term “Moses” means the first 5 books of the Bible. We also call this the Pentateuch. Moses was to the Jews what Paul is to most Christians. He’s not God, but he was the hero of the OT and every issue that mattered was referenced in his writings.

So the question is laid out: Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? Is this permissible? Is this legal?

Now, basically everyone in Judaism said yes. Some were more conservative, some were more lax just like today. But pretty much everyone said yes. When John got thrown in jail it was a big deal. He was stepping on toes that even the religious leaders wouldn’t step on.

So they set the trap, and Jesus asks them what their view is. And they say that Moses allowed divorce. You could write a certificate of divorce and send her away. Moses is pro-divorce. As long as it’s legal and official, what’s the problem?

Where does that come from? That comes from **Deut. 24:1-4**. Turn over there a minute. This is really the only place where we see a certificate of divorce issued. But I want you to notice what the actual command here is. There’s a lot of words, and the scenario is rather complicated, but there’s only one command. **Read 1-4**

So they get married, later on there is some indecency. We don’t know what that is - probably some sexual sin that’s not quite deserving of stoning - but we don’t know. He sends her out with a certificate of divorce. Notice there’s no command to do that, it’s just assumed.

Then she goes and gets married again. We’re not told if that’s good or bad, but she does and it’s a recognized marriage. But if the second husband also finds something indecent in her and divorces her - or he dies - then the command here is just one command: do not go back to the first man. He’s no longer your husband and can’t be anymore.

That would be an abomination. There is no command here to write a certificate. There’s no command here to get divorced. The only command is **do not go back** to the first guy. And a lot of people think that’s because if she did she’d get a second dowry. Maybe she’s just someone who wants the money. But any way you slice it, the only command here is to not go back to the first husband.

Now, what we do have to recognize is that by the time of Moses, divorce and remarriage was common place. So common that people needed certificates to prove that their marriage was terminated. Jethro, Moses’s father in law, had likely helped Moses preside over many divorces when he told Moses that Moses had to get some help judging people. Divorce certificates, like marriage certificates, are not just religious, they are also legal documents.

These would have needed to be issued. So there is prudence having a document, but there’s no command. But what Jesus does is add a commentary on this. Why did Moses institute certificates? Why is there divorce and a need to have a document proving the marriage was terminated?

Jesus tells us: because of the hardness of your hearts he wrote you this commandment.

Listen, people might get married for good reasons or for bad reasons. But people always get divorced because of sin. It could be all one party or it could be both parties, but it’s always sin that terminates a marriage.

Hardness of heart is sin. Whether it’s the adulterer that files for divorce or the spouse who didn’t commit any sin who files for divorce, hardness of heart is at the root of it.

And just to be clear, in our society if just one spouse wants a divorce it will happen. There is no stopping it. There might be delaying it, but no stopping it. No fault divorce has brought all kinds of miserable consequences into our society.

So Moses allowed for the provision of divorce. He authorized the certificates. He did not command divorce and did not look favorably on divorce. In fact, the only command we have here is against remarriage to the original spouse.

Let's look back at **Mark 10**. Moses is against divorce.

2) God is against divorce. **Read 6-9**

Moses made a concession because of the hardness of heart. But God did not design divorce when he designed marriage. God designed male and female - only two genders - and it's a man and a woman who marry.

God also designed that the kids would leave their parents. That's a feature, not a bug. When people get married, they are their own family unit and the parents need to respect that. And the adult, married children need to ensure they are building their own family unit first and foremost.

God designed that a new family unit would be created: they leave and cleave, as the old KJV said. They hold fast to one another. And more than that they become one flesh. This speaks to the intimacy in the marriage. The consummation aspect of marriage which is holy and good and right and in a very literal way and a spiritual way solidifies the vows the married couple has taken by making the two into one.

And this is an act of God. This is not something the couple does. This is not something the pastor does or the state does, though all three involved. At the end of the day, this is something that God does. He brings the 2 together in spiritual union for the purpose of having kids.

Mal. 2:15: Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union.

Stop there. God makes a man and a woman into husband and wife. And the binding of them together into one is a spiritual binding. He gives every marriage a portion of his Spirit. Even with unbelievers, even in unequally yoked marriages. How do we know that? Because God is railing on unbelievers for divorcing! What are you doing?! Don't you know what I've done in this union?

And so God has made them one. And that's shown and sealed in the intimate union and God goes on to say:

Mal. 2:15: Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Do you know what he was seeking? Godly offspring.

Marriage is initiated and performed by a holy God, bound by the Holy Spirit, reflecting the true marriage of Jesus to his holy Church, that the couple would have holy offspring.

God is not indifferent to marriage. He has done all this work. And the contrast couldn't be more clear: what **God** has put together, let not **man** separate. When people divorce they are trifling with the spiritual eternal work of Almighty God whom created marriage to display the eternal covenant of redemption in Christ. That's a big deal.

You've seen these guys in Europe going into museums and pouring glue and paint on artwork that is hundreds or thousands of years old. In a matter of moments a classic work of art that can never be replaced is ruined by some radical. They've ruined what was brilliantly designed. That's what happens in divorce: people ruin the work of God in joining people into holy matrimony.

Look at 1 Cor. 7 for a moment. Paul repeats this very line of argumentation here. We looked at this a couple years ago, so let me catch you up to the context. Paul will say some commands are from him, others from Jesus. He's not saying his commands are less authoritative. He's not saying they're suggestions. He's saying that some of the things come directly from the mouth of Jesus. Other things are still inspired by the Holy Spirit, but Jesus didn't say them, Paul did. So all of this is inspired. **Read 10-11**

So this is the exact same teaching. And it is the same teaching because it comes directly from Jesus. That's what Paul is doing: simply quoting Jesus. He does add, parenthetically, if she does divorce she is to either remain unmarried or reconcile with her husband.

Don't get divorced. But if you disobey that command, don't get remarried to someone else. Obviously reconciliation is on the table. Which I think helps us in our society where sometimes a spouse doesn't want divorce but is forced into it by the other spouse. It gives them guidance on what to do: don't get remarried. Or remarry the spouse who divorced you.

And maybe that never ever happens. Then that's okay. What they can do is show the rest of the world, God, angels, their ex wife, ex husband, everyone that they meant what they said when they covenanted until death do us part.

Because that's the reflection of Christ and the Church. Jesus will never ever leave us or forsake us. We believe in once saved, always saved - eternal security? Great. We display that reality in keeping our covenant.

And even if that marriage is to an unbeliever. This is amazing. **Read 12-16**

So we know that Christians should only marry Christians. It is a sin for a Christian to marry an unbeliever. We should never encourage that or support that.

Don't be unequally yoked, but more than that Paul simply tells us at the end of this chapter that we are to marry in the Lord. Only marry other Christians. **1 Cor. 7:39-40**

But sometimes two unbelievers get married and one comes to faith in Jesus. What then? Well, don't leave them. If they're fine with you, you stay with them. "Well what about intimacy?" We probably wouldn't think much of this, but especially for Jewish believers this would be hard. Jews were not allowed to be intimate with pagans. Unless the pagan converted to worshipping Yahweh, being circumcised, there was to be no intimacy. How could the person of God be intimate with a pagan?

So they may have wrestled with "How can I be one with someone who is spiritually unclean?" Paul says actually the Holy Spirit who is inside of a Christian and who has bound your union makes the unbelieving spouse clean, or holy. It doesn't save her, but makes her authorized to be intimate with. And to have kids with. It's okay for an Christian wife to have intimacy with her unbelieving husband and have kids. The kids are not defiled, the spouse does not defile them.

There is a type of spiritual sanctification - if we can use that word - that happens on the unbelieving spouse and the unbelieving children. It doesn't automatically save them. Salvation is by personal faith in Jesus alone. But it does allow for marriage union to go on.

What if the unbeliever wants out? What if they think the Christian spouse is bonkers now? They think they've become a religious whacko? Then let them go. You're not enslaved. Be at peace. It's not like their salvation is on the line and you have to force them to stay with you. If want to stay do, great! But they may want out. Let them go.

Doesn't that give us freedom to remarry? Nope. We go back to Paul's original command: stay unmarried. Or else reconcile.

So what we see here is that Paul backs up - and really expands - on everything that Jesus said. Don't get a divorce.

Alright, let's look back at **Mark 10**. So Moses says no divorce. God says no divorce.

3) Jesus says no divorce - and no remarriage. **Read 10-12**

So this is later that evening. They're no longer in public anymore, they're in the quiet of the house and the disciples have some questions. What Jesus has said is radical. And I'll show you how radical in a minute. But

it's radical. They know it, he knows it, and the Pharisees know it. So they're sitting there like, "Can you clear that up for us?"

And so he lays it out as plainly as possible: If you divorce your wife and marry another, it's adultery. And if he divorces and marries another it's adultery. Mark makes it clear that it goes both ways.

Not only don't divorce, but don't remarry. That would be an additional sin. No divorce, and no remarriage.

Rom. 7:1-3 and 1 Cor. 7 makes it clear remarriage is only allowable in the event that a spouse dies. If your spouse dies, then the covenant is over. You don't have to remarry, but you can remarry to a Christian.

There's a lot of times when it's hard to fathom someone else other than the husband or wife you had for decades. How would you ever marry another? That's okay. There's not always an obligation to get remarried.

Interestingly, if you're a young widow Paul tells you to go get married, have babies and manage your household so you don't become an idler or gossip or busybody giving Satan a reason to slander you. That is a command with younger widows. **1 Tim. 5:11-16**

With older ones it's okay not to marry. It's also okay to marry. You're not betraying your spouse for marrying another.

But here, to divorce is wrong and to remarry another is to commit adultery - for both the man and woman.

Look at Luke 16:18. Luke's recording is very brief. It's the shortest of all 3 synoptic gospels - Matthew, Mark and Luke. But he also adds an element that's important. **Read**

So not only is it wrong to divorce and remarry for that individual, but it's wrong to marry a divorced woman. I think the implication is also clear, it's wrong to marry a divorced man as well. Why? Because it's adultery. It's the sin of violating their marriage covenant.

And you guys, if our response to this is: well, but it's just adultery the one time - that should grieve our heart. Imagine saying that to your husband or wife, "Well, I just committed adultery the one time." What? No.

I remember having a conversation with a Christian guy a couple years ago and he was getting serious about a lady. And it turned out she had been divorced, it was just irreconcilable differences.

Side: Every marriage has irreconcilable differences.

But she had divorced and he was pursuing her. And I had to tell him: this woman is another man's wife. You are dating and kissing and holding hands and planning life with another man's wife. You are committing adultery in the heart, but if you marry you will be engaging in adultery. And that stopped him dead in his tracks.

It should stop him dead in his tracks. This isn't his wife. It's interesting that Jesus assumes the covenant is still in force even if they are divorced. **Look at this. Read 18**

He who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. This is a very specific word here. Moicheuo. Specifically meaning a violation of the marriage covenant. Think about that. The divorce brought about by man, doesn't nullify the covenant ratified by God. They're not committing sexual immorality - pornea. They're committing adultery.

This is why Paul if you are divorced stay unmarried. The covenant is still in full force.

Put another way, if the covenant were nullified, if the marriage was truly dissolved, there wouldn't be adultery. It would be entirely acceptable because the covenant would be gone. The intimacy that consummates the new marriage would be worship and glorious just like two people who had never been married or a widower getting married.

But here it's adultery. It's a violation because she (or he) is still obligated to the covenant.

No divorce. No remarriage.

Okay, what about the exception passages?

We already saw the 1 in **1 Cor. 7**, which is abandonment. I made the case that the option there is to remain unmarried or else reconcile. That's pretty straightforward.

Some would argue that remarriage is acceptable if the spouse is an unbeliever but we don't see that. What about if we got married before we were Christians? God still put you together. The covenant is still in force. When a married couple comes to faith in Jesus we don't remarry them. Why not? Because their marriage was always valid.

Marriage is a common grace to all people.

Which leaves the issue of adultery. Can you get divorced for adultery? Isn't that the exception? My answer is no. For two reasons.

First, Jesus never, ever says adultery terminates marriage or is a legitimate grounds for divorce. He uses another word - *pornea* - which specifically refers to sexual sin outside of the marriage covenant.

Second, we only see the exception clauses 2 times, both in the book of Matthew. That's significant because Matthew is the only book that records that Joseph wanted to divorce Mary because he thought she had sinned. But Joseph wasn't fully married to Mary.

Joseph was **betroted** to Mary. They were called husband and wife, they were recognized as a legal couple. The only thing that hadn't happened was the official marriage and the consummation.

And I believe that the exception clause in Matthew refers to sexual sin during the Jewish betrothal period. Where if one of the parties committed sexual sin, then the other could get a legal divorce - that's what it was called in Jesus's day - and terminate the betrothal. And in both places it's called *pornea* - sexual immorality - not *moicheao*, adultery.

Turn to Matt 19. This is Matthew's rendering. **Read 1-9**

So he adds the exception clause. And he uses both words. "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery." We've seen that. But he gives one exception: *pornea*. Sexual immorality outside of the covenant of marriage. Why doesn't he use the specific word "*moicheao*" meaning specifically adultery within marriage. That would make more sense.

Again, I think he's referring to the Joseph situation. Here's another reason I think that. Because look at the response of the disciples. **Read 10**

If Jesus is actually giving a broad exception for all kinds of sexual sin, that's not very radical. That's what most people in Jesus's day believed. But this is the response to Jesus: it's better not to marry. They get the gravity of what he's calling them to. And he doesn't back down. **Read 10-12**

What does that mean? He's saying "you're right, this is tough." Some people won't get married because their parents made them eunuchs. They have no equipment to consummate the marriage. Others make themselves eunuchs, usually to serve the king or queen. And still others make themselves functional eunuchs - no marriage - for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. They don't get married because they realize how high the calling is.

And then he puts the cherry on top: let the one who is able to receive this, receive it. This is a crazy hard saying and Jesus knows it. The only thing this radical is the permanence view.

Prov 18:22: He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.

That's an objective truth. If you have a spouse, you have favor from the Lord. Whether it's easy, or difficult. Whether you're newly married or have been at it for decades. It's favor because God designed it to reflect the love between Christ and the church.

And when the Bible talks about the depth of God's love for us there is always one place in the Bible it focuses on. You know where that is? The cross. I don't know if you noticed, but the cross was not easy. It was not comfortable and joyful. It was nails and blood and death.

And maybe you're thinking "you know, I might just go ahead and take the nails, it might be easier." Maybe. But what that means is that in the midst of extreme difficulty you can love deeply and reflect the grace of God profoundly by holding fast to your covenant, just like Jesus held fast to his.

Pray