

Marriage Matters

- Mark 10:1-12
- Jesus is now in Judea and will soon begin making his way into Jerusalem. But there is still teaching that has to be done, discipleship that is vital for the preparation of the 11 apostles to face what is coming. And to lead the church. First, Jesus discipled his disciples on the matter of marriage. The year was probably AD 30 or so. In Judaism there were two schools of thought with regard to divorce, and we see that reflected in the Pharisees' question to him in verse 2. "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" The Matthew account of this event includes, "for any cause." That's because those who followed the teaching of Shammai believed that the only reason for divorce was infidelity, unfaithfulness, adultery. Those who followed Hillel believed that a man could divorce his wife if she burnt the toast, or if he found someone prettier.
- The Pharisees bring this question to Jesus, not because they wanted to learn but because they wanted to trap him, to "test him," as Mark says. They come with questions about how far they can go in dissolving a marriage, **not** with questions about how far they should go in keeping a marriage together. It would be like asking the pastor who is taking you through premarital counseling, "So, give me all the ways I can get out of this marriage if I find out that I don't like it." It would be like applying to a college and being told you are accepted and then asking, "How much of the work can I decide I am not going to do in my classes, and still be ok?" That's what we see here. The Pharisees wanted to talk about divorce, but Jesus insisted on talking about marriage. To paraphrase James Edwards, "You don't learn to fly an airplane by following the instructions every time you go up on how to make a crash landing."
- Jesus answers them first with Moses, then with Creation.
- **Moses (verses 3-5)**
- Jesus sends them back to Scripture, knowing that their proof-text is **Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Look there.** The purpose of this ruling from Moses was not to encourage divorce but to slow the process down, to make the man write down the reason for the divorce, to give the divorced woman a right to re-marry. Sinclair Ferguson writes, "Moses' words were intended to create a legal barrier to men sinning as they pleased...in part to protect the rights of women. Rather than giving permission for divorce to take place, (these words) were intended to restrict the ease with which divorce would take place." Because of the hardness of men's hearts, as Jesus points out, Moses gave these commandments. What was written to be a barrier had been turned into a bridge, and the Pharisees were as guilty as anyone of twisting the Scriptures to make them say what they wanted. These scriptures were not given as a pretext for divorce but as an attempt to limit its worst consequences. Jesus will now show them that God's intention for marriage cannot be discovered in a text about divorce. He points them back, beyond the law of Moses to the design of creation.
- **Creation (verses 6-9)**
- "But from the beginning of creation." This speaks to our design, identity, purpose, and life! "But from the beginning of creation" is a phrase that should cause the hairs on our

necks to stand up. Paul wrote in Colossians 1 that Jesus is the “image of the invisible God,” the one by whom “all things were created, in heaven and on earth.” John wrote in his prologue, “All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” (John 1:1-3) Jesus, the agent of creation points to the fundamental authority in creation itself when he teaches us about marriage. What do we learn from God’s unchangeable design in His creation? These are foundational truths. Doctrinal bedrock.

- Verse 6: “God made them male and female.” Jesus refers here to Genesis 1:27, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Notice that Jesus says that gender is binary. There are only two: male and female. And in answering the question about a man divorcing his wife, Jesus states clearly that marriage from the beginning was God’s design, for a man and a woman to become one flesh. God-ordained marriage requires a man and a woman.
- Verse 7: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife.” Here Jesus quotes from Genesis 2:24, a creation text that teaches a man’s obligation to his wife is greater than his obligation to his parents. It is the same for her. She leaves her home to make another. I like the practice we see in Scripture of a man asking a woman’s father for permission to marry his daughter. As with Jacob, going to Laban for permission to marry Rachel. But a young man needs to be ready for the questions, like this story illustrates. This is not me, I promise, but there are some similarities, especially in the questions I was asked. “So what are your plans?” the father asks the young man. “I am a Bible scholar,” he replies. “A Bible scholar. Hmm,” the father says. “Admirable, but what will you do to provide a nice house for my daughter to live in as she’s accustomed to?” “I will study,” the young man replies, “and God will provide for us.” “And how will you buy her a beautiful engagement ring such as she deserves?” asks the father. “I will concentrate on my studies,” the young man replies, “and God will provide for us.” “And children?” asks the father. “How will you support children?” “Don’t worry, sir, God will provide,” he replies. Later the mother asks, “How did it go, honey?” The father answers, “He has no job and no plans, and he thinks I’m God.”
- Ok, back to the point, the man and the woman leave the authority of their parents to submit to a new authority. Edwards writes that this makes “marriage second only to obedience to God in sacredness.”
- Verse 8: “And the two shall become one flesh.” There are many truths here, and we know that one is that physical oneness is the only biological process that can produce children. We know that some couples cannot have children, and that doesn’t make them any less married! But the normative truth is that marriage produces future generations. Another truth is that in the same way we are one with Christ through spiritual rebirth, we are to become one with our wife or husband through marriage. There is a oneness of purpose, of thought, of love and affection. We are growing more and more in love with Christ as his children and his future bride, and that happens intentionally. It should be the same in a marriage, so that it is said of married couples more and more, “they are no longer two but one flesh.”
- Verse 9: “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” This was not part of the Genesis account, but it has just as much authority as it comes from the Lord

of all Creation. Jesus adds this because a man in the Jewish culture was considered the lord over his marriage and could decide whether he wanted to keep his wife or cast her out. Jesus says, "No, you've got it wrong. God is Lord over the marriage." It is neither the man nor the woman who controls marriage, but it is *God* who has joined husband and wife. Whenever I officiate a wedding, I like to remind the couple that though there are many human witnesses seated behind them, the most important witness is standing with them, God himself.

- Next we see Jesus with his disciples "in the house," where they feel safe to ask him about what he had just taught. Jesus answers them that a man who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery and the same applies to a wife who divorces her husband and marries another. Matthew adds that Jesus said, "And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." (Matt. 19:9) He says the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount, according to Matthew 5:32.
- You cannot say, "Oh, OK, infidelity equals divorce." We know that it is not a commandment, as it was for the rabbis! "Your spouse has committed adultery, so you **must** get a divorce." No, we know that God forgives, and calls us to do the same. Edwards writes, "In our day of impermanent commitments and casual divorce,...will we seek relief in what is permitted, or commit ourselves to what is intended by God and commanded by Christ? Will we fall away in trouble and difficulty, or follow Jesus in the costly journey of discipleship, even in marriage?"
- May I remind you again, dear brothers and sisters, that marriage is a picture of the Gospel? We know this from when Paul repeated the Creator's words in Ephesians 5, that a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. Then Paul adds, "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." (Eph. 5:31-32) Christ and the church! The Gospel is on display in a godly marriage, the sacrificial love of a husband for his wife and a wife for her husband. Godly marriage strengthens the church, the community and the nation. A godly marriage is a blessing not only while the couple lives, but long after they are gone.
- Prayer