

# THE TRUE MEANING OF MARRIAGE

Mark 10:1-12

Key Verses: 10:7-8

*“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” So they are no longer two, but one.*

In this passage, Jesus teaches us the spiritual meaning of marriage and divorce. The marriage standard of a society can tell a lot about the spiritual condition of the society. Genesis chapter 6 describes how, in Noah’s time, men had become corrupt in their hearts. In the description, their marriage standard is the first thing that is mentioned. Genesis 6:2 says: “The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.” God’s heart was broken over this. “What’s wrong with a man marrying a beautiful woman he chooses?” one may ask. The problem was that their marriage standard revealed their spiritual degradation. Marriage was first established by God for his purpose. But people in Noah’s time ignored his purpose and chose their marriage partners based on physical attractions only. This grieved the Lord. We learn from today’s passage that we need to have a biblical view of marriage and divorce.

## I. JESUS TEACHES THE WORD OF GOD (1)

Look at verse 1. *Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.* Jesus left Capernaum (9:33) and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan to the border area in the east of the Jordan. Then he would cross the Jordan again to go to Jericho (10:46). Where was Jesus going? He was on his way up to Jerusalem (10:32). This trip from Galilee to Jerusalem would be his last. He would die on the cross in Jerusalem. He would go through much pain, suffering and mental anguish in the hands of the religious leaders and the cruel Roman soldiers. Finally he would be crucified as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). Like a lamb led to the slaughter, he would remain silent. He would take up our infirmities and carry our sorrows (Isa 53:4).

Now if an ordinary person had all these things ahead of him, he would surely be preoccupied with his own problems. But Jesus was different. When crowds of people came to him, he taught them the word of God, as was his custom. He put his sheep over his own problems. Most of all, he put the word of God above all else. He knew that the people came to him hoping to have their own problems taken care of, such as their sickness. But what Jesus really wanted them to have was the word of God. Teaching the word of God sounds very impractical. What the people needed most was his medical, financial or emotional attention. What good was the word of God to these people who were in need? Similarly, today’s young people are in need of many things. They need money. They need friends. They seem to be in need for someone who could play basketball with or watch a good movie together. What good is the word of God to them? Wouldn’t it be more practical if we had some activities such as weekly bowling night instead of Wednesday Fellowship?

But Jesus taught them the word of God as of first importance. Why? The word of God is no ordinary word. The Bible is no ordinary book. It is the book of the truth and life. Hebrews 4:12 says: "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." The word of God can convict our hearts to turn away from our sinful way of life and turn to God. The word of God can give us clear guidelines in life in this confusing world. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 read: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Most of all, the word of God gives us eternal life. In John 5:24 Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." This is the reason why Jesus taught the word of God in season and out of season.

Today's young people really need the word of God. Many of them grow up in moral wilderness. Their sense of right or wrong is often formed by watching TV or surfing the Internet. Their teachers cannot help them to have a spiritual value system. So many of them have no moral qualm about abortion and consider homosexuality or sex outside of marriage normal. Divorce is no big deal as it happens so frequently. How about the issue of gay marriage? They need to learn the word of God to have a right value system. That's why Jesus taught the people the word of God. That's why we should also share the word of God with young people of our time. Only the word of God can give them eternal life!

## II. OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE (2-12)

Look at verse 2. *Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"* As Jesus was teaching the word of God, certain religious leaders, Pharisees, came and asked the question, "Is it legal for a man to divorce his wife?" They asked this question not because they wanted to learn from Jesus but because they wanted to trap him. With their flowing beards and in their purple robes, the Pharisees looked holy and dignified outwardly, but they had a vicious motive in asking the question. So how would this question be a trap for Jesus? I think the Pharisees knew from his previous teachings that Jesus did not approve divorce. So they asked him the question, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" If Jesus answered yes, he would have contradicted his own teaching. If he said no, he would have violated the law of Moses which was very serious to the Jews. The Pharisees thought that they had a perfect question to discredit Jesus and his ministry. How did Jesus respond to the religious leaders? Jesus took the opportunity to teach them the true meaning of marriage.

**First, "What did Moses command you?"** Look at verses 3-5. *"What did Moses command you?" he replied. They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied.* Jesus asked the Pharisees to recite Moses' Law concerning divorce as a starting point of his teaching. It is true that Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send his wife away (Dt 14:1-4). Apparently the religious leaders took this as the endorsement for a liberal divorce policy. But they were

mistaken. In fact, Moses was not encouraging divorce. We need to think about the background and intention of the law of Moses.

When God's chosen people of Israel came out of Egypt, they had been slaves in that country for 430 years. Although God set them free from the slavery life and appointed Moses to lead them to the promised land, they were still steeped in their slave mentality. In fact, God had to train them in the wilderness for 40 years to get rid of their slave mentality before entering Canaan. During this time, God gave them his law through his servant Moses to teach them how to be a holy nation people. So why did he permit a man to divorce his wife with a written certificate of divorce? Apparently the Israelites were divorcing their wives whenever they felt like it. Women were treated like commodities. They divorced their wives at random. This was not good in God's eyes. This was unbecoming of God's chosen people. So God gave them a law of divorce through his servant Moses, allowing them to divorce their wives only when they had legitimate reasons and could spell them out on a written certificate. Clearly the law was not intended to encourage divorce. Rather, it was to discourage a lawless divorce. *"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,"* Jesus told the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were quoting Moses out of context. They viewed marriage and divorce only from a legal angle rather than seeing as a moral or spiritual issue. Jesus told them: *"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law."* The Jewish leaders apparently used the law of Moses concerning divorce as a pretext for divorce. They used the scripture to follow their own desires. They did not know the heart of God. Their hearts were hard.

**Second, "what God has joined together."** Jesus did not stop at teaching the original intention of the divorce law. He taught them the spiritual meaning of marriage by studying with them a Bible lesson from Genesis 2:20-24. Laws cannot solve sin problem. So Jesus taught them the word of God. Let us read verses 6-9. *"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."* The first thing we learn from Jesus' teaching of marriage is that it was established by God. When God saw Adam working hard in the Garden of Eden, he said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." So he created a female, Eve, a suitable helper for Adam and joined them together to carry out their mission from God together as coworkers. God blessed their marriage and he was happy to see them work together to fulfill his purpose.

Indeed, marriage is the most important event in a person's life. There are three important events in a person's life—birth, marriage and death. Marriage is the only one the person knows what's going on and can enjoy the blessing with his or her family members and friends. But in this sinful world, marriage has become a burden to many people. Socrates is quoted as saying to young men: "By all means marry. If you get a good wife, you will become very happy; if you get a bad one, you will become a philosopher—and that is also good." Other people also commented on the burdensome nature of marriage, saying: "All men are born free, but some get married," or "The most

impressive example of tolerance is a golden wedding anniversary.” Marriage is a blessing from God. But some young men today remain single in order to avoid commitment and enjoy a sinful life freely. In this environment, some women are afraid of getting married for fear of broken marriage. Statistics show that more young people are “shacking up” without marital commitment.

In teaching the spiritual meaning of marriages, Jesus quotes from Genesis 2:24: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” Jesus also added: “*So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.*” This teaches us that God intended for marriage to be a life-long commitment. Divorce was not in his mind when he established marriage. What does it mean that “they are no longer two, but one”? It means that marriage is a union between a man and a woman. But Genesis teaches us that marriage as God instituted is to achieve spiritual as well as physical union so that the husband and wife may serve God’s purpose with one accord. A union between husband and wife can be achieved in several different levels. One is physical or sexual union. Two people become one flesh. Physical union is necessary for intimacy and to have children. But if a marital union is based on only physical attractions, the marriage is doomed because our bodies get old and gravity takes toll on us as we get old. The next level of union is emotional or intellectual—meeting of two minds. Husband and wife must be able to appreciate things together and understand each other’s needs deeply. Many marriages do last long when two minds meet together and they learn to care for each other. But this is not always possible. People’s emotions and minds change over time. The highest level of union between husband and wife occurs when they are united in God and to serve God’s mission. Such couples face the same problems in life as any other couples, but they learn to overcome them by faith in God. And they pray together. Statistics show that the divorce rate among those who pray together is much lower than those of others. God remains in the center of their family and lives.

We learn here that God established marriage and family as the most fundamental building block of the human society so that two people may form one unit to serve his purpose together. God wants his people to cwork together to serve his mission. Unfortunately, this original purpose of God for marriage is ignored in many societies today as marriage is often viewed as a transaction or a union for only emotional and physical needs. Some people get married in a church building, but when they go home, God and his mission are set aside for their own desires. As a result, even many Christian couples suffer divorces. In the process, many young children cry silently at night. Divorce is like trying to separate two sheets of paper which are glued together. Neither of the sheets comes out without damage. Above all, Jesus says: “Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” Divorce is a direct challenge to God’s authority.



**Third, divorce and adultery.** Look at verse 10. *When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this.* When they were alone, the disciples asked Jesus about the teaching. The disciples did not quite understand Jesus’ teaching on marriage

and divorce. But they had a learning mind. So they asked Jesus about this. The disciples were no match to the Pharisees in terms of education and intellectual capacity. But what made them great in the eyes of the Lord was the fact that they had a learning mind. We can grow in our spiritual knowledge if we have a learning mind.

What did Jesus teach them? Look at verses 11-12. *He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."* These verses make it clear that divorce is not just men's problem. It is women's problem as well. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, about 50% of marriages end in divorces since 1970s compared to 25% in the 1950s.<sup>1</sup> Many people go to Las Vegas or Mexico for a quick divorce. There are many web sites that claim to help for a quick and easy divorce. I saw one web site selling a "Do-It-Yourself Divorce Kit" at only \$33.95. In Pennsylvania, no-fault divorce is the law, that is, when a spouse files for divorce, it becomes automatic after two years. Many people put down their reason for divorce as "irreconcilable differences." But Jesus teaches us that adultery is a motive for divorce. Jesus said: *"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."* Indeed, many people's motive for divorce is to abandon the current spouse and get together with another partner. Adultery is a major reason for divorce. Jesus teaches us that divorcing wife or husband for an adulterous desire is a sin against God.

In today's passage, we learned that Jesus taught the word of God despite his impending sufferings. We should also share the word of God with young students until they come to know Christ personally and develop a spiritual sense of what is right and what is wrong. To know the spiritual meaning of marriage and divorce is especially important for young people. Marriage was established by God so that a man and his wife may form a spiritual as well as physical union to serve God's purpose. As such, marriage is a life-long commitment. It is also a blessing, not a burden. Let us read the key verses, 7-8, once again: *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." So they are no longer two, but one.*

---

<sup>1</sup> According to the National Center for Health Statistics, the total numbers of U.S. divorces (*excluding* the non-counting states) reported finalized annually are 957,200 in 2000, 944,317 in 1999, and 947,384 in 1998. The total numbers of U.S. marriages (*including* those states) reported celebrated annually are 2,355,005 in 2000, 2,366,623 in 1999, and 2,267,854 in 1998.