

Follow: Marriage & Discipleship

Mark 10:1-12

There was a man in Virginia who lost his wife a couple of years ago after being married for around 60 years. He was a very kind, quiet man who worked as a college professor. His wife was anything but quiet. She was more the life of the party and had a performers flair to her. Once his wife died I would take him to lunch to spend some time with him because he was living alone and it was obvious that he absolutely adored her. I loved to hear him talk about her. His tone of voice would change and there would be a sparkle in his eye. He thought she was funny, dramatic, talented, and that she made him a better person.

There are very few things in life I admire more than a couple who have been married for 50 plus years who obviously still like each other. Marriage is intended to be an incredible gift from God to us and nothing else in life has the power of marriage to build you up or destroy you. Marriage is the most important earthly relationship you will enter in this life and that's why when we think about discipleship we have to think about marriage.

Open your Bibles to Mark 10. We have been following Jesus and the disciples on this journey toward Jerusalem and learning what it means to be a follower of Christ. One of the major things we have seen repeatedly is that kingdom followers of Jesus have an entirely different perspective than the culture in which they live. The culture measures greatness in how many people serve you but Christ measures greatness in how many people you serve. In our passage today we will learn how followers of Christ approach marriage, which is in great contrast to the culture of their day and ours. If you and I aren't careful we will begin to adopt the cultural mentality toward marriage, but we must actively and intentionally let God's Word determine how we view this most important of relationships. So, today we will look at **3 convictions that separate a disciple's perspective on marriage from the cultures.**

1. Disciples Recognize the Reason for Divorce (vv. 1-5)

You can tell a lot about a society's views of marriage by understanding divorce in that culture. The last couple of weeks, back to verse 33, Jesus and the disciples have been in Capernaum and we've seen different conversations regarding

discipleship taking place. Jesus has been pressing the principle, found in verse 35, on the disciples. Let me remind you of this.

Now in 10:1 we see them continue on their journey. So, where are they going? Here's a map that shows where they most likely went. This would not have been an unusual way for Jews to journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. Obviously at this point in his ministry Jesus is a known entity, so crowds of people gather around him and he teaches them.

In the last couple of chapters, we've seen Jesus focus on the disciples and not the crowds, but ultimately even this public ministry becomes a clear opportunity to teach his disciples what it means to follow Him. Of course, the crowds aren't just common people coming to learn. Look at verse 2.

We've seen this sort of questioning from the Pharisees before back in chapter 7 regarding the disciples and hand washing. Here the Pharisees come specifically to test him. This means they are asking this question to specifically try to trip Jesus up or create public problems for Jesus. If you remember, John the Baptist had lost his head over speaking out publicly about Herod's wife's divorce and remarriage so perhaps they were trying to get Jesus in similar trouble.

Whatever the motivation, it's important to understand a little bit about the debate over divorce and remarriage among Jews during Jesus's day. There were two main interpretations of the OT. First, the more conservative school believed that divorce and remarriage was only permissible in cases of adultery. This was the minority view and not the one the Pharisees held to. The second view, which was by far the more common view, was that a man could divorce his wife for almost any reason if he gave her an official divorce certificate. This even included divorce over the wife burning a meal.

So, in light of the cultural opinions on this matter, this question probably is short for "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?" Jesus answers with a question in verse 3. He asks them what Moses commanded in the Torah or Pentateuch and notice how they respond in verse 4. Jesus asks them what God, through Moses commanded, and the Pharisees tell him what they believe God allowed.

This is typical of their use and abuse of Scripture. They are always looking for loopholes. The passage they use for their loophole is found in Deut. 24:1-4. Let's read this. There's a lot that could be said about this passage, but I want you to notice that in verses 1-3 Moses uses the word "if" a lot. He's not giving the legal grounds for divorce. He's setting up a situation where divorce has occurred and then in verse 4 he gives the command. If a man has divorced his wife, he must give her an official document outlining the reasons and finalizing the divorce and then if she remarries, he cannot take her back from her new husband. All of this is to protect the woman from being dehumanized and moved around.

This passage is hardly outlining God's full expectations regarding marriage and divorce. Why does Moses give this passage? Look at what Jesus says in Mark 10:5.

This is the real reason Deut. 24 is even necessary and why any and all divorce happens. We've seen hardness of heart in the Gospel of Mark and it's always against God. A person's heart is hard when they have solidified themselves against God's will and Word.

Divorce is not God's design for marriage. The Pharisees were treating marriage like a cell phone contract that could be entered and then voided with only minor inconvenience.

Our culture, in similar ways, is increasingly de-valuing marriage. More marriages are ending in divorce, but young people are less interested in marriage and don't see the importance of it. If we aren't going to great lengths to let our perspectives be shaped by God's will and Word, we will subtly and incrementally adopt cultural values when it comes to marriage and divorce. So, how should disciples of Jesus understand marriage and divorce? That brings us to our second conviction.

2. Disciples Believe the Truth about Marriage (vv. 6-9)

Jesus begins verse 6 with the word "but". He is contrasting the Pharisees wholly inadequate view of marriage with God's design. To do this, he roots our understanding in creation before the fall into sin. This is how things were intended to be. He teaches three overall truths about humans and marriage that we must understand.

First, being male and female is part of our identity as image bearers of God. Notice that he quotes Genesis 1:27 in verse 6. The creation of man and woman is

the highpoint of creation. We are made to be reflections of God and to image Him as we take dominion over his good world. Part of imaging him and fulfilling his plan for humans is being made male and female. Being gendered is fundamental to our identity. This is why the current trend of viewing gender as a cultural construct is so damaging. God created each person in this room either male or female and both genders, together, gloriously reflect and showcase God. To deny that reality is to tamper with the basic building blocks of who we are.

Second, God designed marriage as a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman. Because we are made male and female in God's image we are designed for this marriage relationship. Look at verse 7-8. This doesn't mean single people aren't properly reflecting God or living to their full potential. The Bible honors singleness in many other places. But God's design is for one man and one woman to leave their parents, to come together in covenant union and become one flesh, permanently.

Now, it's so important that we grasp marriage as a covenant union. Why do I say this? You can see in verse 7, which is a quote from Genesis 2:24, that the man and woman are to "hold fast" or "cling" to each other. This is covenantal language and Christian teaching through the centuries has believed marriage to be a covenant.

A covenant is different from a contract. A covenant is a commitment of binding obligation for the good of the other person. A contract is something you enter into for your own benefit as you receive payment or benefit for upholding your end of the bargain. In the covenant relationship of marriage, the two come together and literally become one; so they no longer live for self, but for the good of the other.

The third truth about marriage that Jesus teaches here is that this covenant does not come about by man's effort. Look at verse 9. God makes the two one. It's not just that they shouldn't be separated. In God's eyes, this covenant cannot be undone because He has created it.

Because of these truths about marriage, disciples must respond by pursuing God's plan for marriage and this is our 3rd conviction.

3. Disciples Pursue God's Plan for Marriage (vv. 10-12)

Jesus has been explaining all this publicly, and as we've seen throughout Mark, the disciples ask him for further clarification privately. Look at verse 10. Why? Well, I imagine that Jesus's answer was shocking to them in some ways. They were used to believing that divorce could be arranged for almost any minor disagreement and Jesus has painted marriage as this profound, permanent relationship established before God. So, what further clarification does Jesus give? Look at verses 11-12.

This seems very straightforward and seems to allow for very little wiggle room. Now, what we typically do when we read this is we start asking, "what about the exceptions where God allows divorce?" I understand why that happens so quickly, but let's let the very stark demands of this verse sit on us for a few minutes.

If you have just read what Jesus says in verses 6-9 about the nature of marriage biblically, these very demanding statements actually make a lot of sense. If marriage is a permanent, one flesh covenant, established by God, then divorcing your spouse and marrying another person is in direct violation of God's design for marriage.

Keep in mind the intention of the Pharisees question, "Is it lawful to divorce your wife for any reason at all?" They were treating marriage as a casual contract and divorce and remarriage without biblical cause means you are acting like your marriage is over when it is not, thus adultery.

Before we talk about exceptions, let me just say that this needs to be the foundational understanding of marriage for followers of Christ. Is the demand high? Yes. There is no other relationship like marriage on earth. The joys are immense, but the opportunity to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Christ is very real and prevalent.

This is the divine intention and it is good and serious. But of course, we live in a fallen world where hardness of heart reigns in all of us. This doesn't excuse divorce and the disciples goal is to live according to God's divine intentions. But if you zoom out to the whole of Scripture there are occasions, brought on by sin, that do lead to a legitimate divorce. If Jesus allowed for no divorce, he wouldn't be consistent with the OT where Moses clearly permitted divorce due to hardness of heart. Think of this passage as the clear statement of God's divine will and then think of the exception clauses in Matthew 19 and 1 Cor. 7 as pastoral applications

to specific circumstances. In Matthew 19 Jesus gives the exception that adultery can be grounds for divorce and in 1 Corinthians 7 one spouse abandoning the other can be grounds for divorce. There are exceptions biblically speaking, but this passage makes it clear that divorce is never God's ideal.

Now, of course, I'm talking to many people who have been impacted by divorce in some way. Maybe your parents got a divorce when you were a child. Maybe you have been divorced in the past. The weight that I have felt particularly strong this morning is to exalt marriage and uphold the glorious vision of marriage while at the same time being pastorally sensitive to those who have been hurt by divorce. If you have been through this you don't need me to tell you that divorce is never God's ideal. You know from first-hand experience how difficult this is.

So how should you be feeling? Well, I think it's appropriate to consider the words of Jesus in Mark 3:28. Forgiveness means that you and I are not dealt with based on our sins any longer in the eyes of God. Our sins have been wiped clean. We live in a broken world and we are broken people, but Jesus specifically came to serve those who are broken by sacrificing His life on the cross. Divorce does not make you unclean. It does not mean you are damaged goods. It means you have experienced the brokenness of this world after the fall and you, like me, need God's grace.

If you are here this morning and you don't have any experience with divorce, you are certainly a recipient of God's grace. Your response to that grace is to take the vertical grace from God that has been shown to you and re-direct that horizontally toward one another. It's also necessary for all of us, as disciples of Jesus, to let our perspective of marriage be shaped by Christ rather than the culture. Let's help one another with this.