

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 10:1-12

Topic

Jesus attributes the Pharisees question about divorce to their hard-heartedness

Title

"Breakin' Up is Hard-hearted to Do"

Introduction

All I really need to know... *I learned in Kindergarten.*

It's the premise, and the title, of a book written by Robert Fulghum in 1988. It was immensely popular, staying on the NY Times bestseller list for two years.

Here are just five of the main life-lessons we learn in Kindergarten:

1. Share everything.
2. Play fair.
3. Don't hit people.
4. Put things back where you found them.
5. (My favorite) Flush.

I'm not 100% sure that all I really need to know about life I learned in Kindergarten... **But I am certain that all I really need to know about marriage I learn from the Garden.**

In an attempt to polarize Him in the eyes of the people, the Pharisees asked Jesus, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

Jesus answered by going back *before* the Law was given. He went all the way back, to the sixth day of creation, to the Garden of Eden, and to how God defined marriage.

Jesus did more than answer them. He took the topic out of the theoretical and made it personal - talking about the condition of their hearts.

I'll organize my thoughts on these verses around two points: #1 If You Are Casual About Divorce, Check Yourself For A Diseased Heart, and #2 If You Are Casual About Divorce, Check Yourself For A Derelict Heart.

#1 If You Are Casual About Divorce,
Check Yourself For A Diseased Heart

(v1-9)

Marriage, divorce, and remarriage are volatile subjects - both in the world, and among believers in Jesus Christ. They are emotionally charged. All of us are affected in some way by marriages gone wrong.

Whatever state you find yourself in today, please hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to you, in the Word of God, and receive it as God's grace to your hurting heart.

Many of my comments will be generic. They will be true, but they may not address the subtleties and nuances of your particular situation with regards to marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Bear that in mind. We are not here to heap burdens upon you.

- If you're in sin, or contemplating it - you'll want to repent.
- If you've failed in the past, then receive God's grace and mercy, and understand you are restored at the Cross.

Mar 10:1 Then He arose from there and came to the region of Judea by the other side of the Jordan. And multitudes gathered to Him again, and as He was accustomed, He taught them again.

We are understandably fascinated by the miracles, the signs, and the wonders that Jesus went about performing. Jesus was first and foremost a teacher. It was His custom to teach.

We believe in miracles, and in signs, and in wonders, even into our present day. But we leave them to God to perform, in His will and timing, while we go on teaching, and sharing the Gospel.

The Gospel is not a lesser message if no miracles attend it. It is not something greater if miracles do attend it. All by itself, when preached, it is the power of God unto salvation.

Mar 10:2 The Pharisees came and asked Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" testing Him.

The intent of the Pharisees was to "test" Jesus. It's the same word used of the devil "tempting" Jesus in the wilderness.

Jesus is going to answer their question by first asking a question. I like that, because it helps you to focus on what is really going on. Try it the next time you're asked a Bible question.

Mar 10:3 And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?"

Mar 10:4 They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to dismiss her."

Jesus started with Moses because this wasn't a random question. Among the Jews, especially the rabbis, there was a controversy over divorce, and the grounds for divorce. The controversy was over the interpretation of a particular phrase in the Book of Deuteronomy.

Please listen while I read to you Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

Deu 24:1 "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 uncleanness in her**, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house,
Deu 24:2 when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife,
Deu 24:3 if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife,
Deu 24:4 then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.

The rabbi's argued over the interpretation of the phrase, "because he has found some uncleanness in her." It divided the two schools of Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai, popular first-century Jewish scholars.

- The Hillel school took a very lax view and said that "uncleanness" meant that the husband could divorce his wife for almost any reason.
- The Shammai school took a stricter view and said that "uncleanness" referred to sexual sins.

It's not our purpose today to teach the passage from Deuteronomy, but I will say a few quick things. Among the Jews, it was common for a wife to be "put away" by her husband. It was an arbitrary action by the husband, not subject to the wife's consent. She need not be guilty of anything, and she certainly had not broken God's Law.

The dismissed wife was in a kind of legal and spiritual limbo. She was technically still a married woman. As a wife who had been abandoned she would have a very difficult time even surviving if she did not have her original family to go back to. Remarriage to another man was unlikely since the circumstances of her dismissal by her husband put a stigma upon her.

Moses addressed this terrible practice of putting away wives. He demanded that the husband give the dismissed wife a certificate of divorce. It was her evidence that she had done nothing unlawful, except that she was detested by her husband. This would remove any stigma from her and enable her to legally remarry.

Moses wasn't giving permission to divorce, or establishing grounds for divorce. He was trying to regulate a practice that was foul and unfair. It was a great mercy to the wives who were treated so unfairly.

OK, back to the Pharisees and Jesus.

Mar 10:5 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.

Zing! No one saw that coming. They spent hours and hours arguing over what Moses might have meant by a certain phrase, when the greater reality was that Moses should never have had to regulate their despicable practice in the first place.

The real issue was ***sklerocardia***. It's the Greek translation of the word for "hardness of... heart." Their hearts had grown hard toward God. They were dishonoring Him by disrespecting marriage, and by looking for the loopholes by which to disregard God's clear intention for, and description of, marriage.

Just to be absolutely clear about marriage, Jesus referred them to the Garden:

Mar 10:6 But from the beginning of the creation, God 'MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE.'

Mar 10:7 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, Mar 10:8 AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh.

Mar 10:9 Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

Yes, we take the Genesis account as history - *not* allegory or mythology. One primary reason we must take it as history is that Jesus took the account as history. He spoke of special creation, of the Garden, of Adam and Eve, *all as if it were literal*. Jesus believed in special creation, over a period of six twenty-four hour days.

Unless you are suggesting that Jesus didn't know any better, because Darwin had not yet come along, please remember this about Jesus: "For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him" (Colossians 1:16).

Jesus is the Creator. He was there, in the Garden, with Adam and Eve. I trust His testimony.

We can summarize God's description of marriage by saying it is the monogamous, heterosexual union of one man, and one woman, to be maintained as long as they live, serving as the firm foundation for humans living in society.

This simple definition is the foil for all the imaginations of men and women and governments seeking to substitute their own definitions of marriage.

"Can I have multiple spouses?" No. "Ah," you say, "but there were lots of polygamous relationships among God's people in the Bible."

As we look at Scripture, none of these arrangements matches the structure of marriage given by God from the beginning.

Just because the Bible records them, it doesn't indicate God was pleased with them. To the contrary, a direct command against polygamy is given to the kings that were to rule Israel, as they are told *not* to "multiply wives" to themselves (Deuteronomy 17:17).

"Can I marry someone of the opposite sex?" No. We certainly recognize that some people have same-sex attraction. I don't agree with those who claim they are wired that way from birth, but, *even if it turns out that you are*, it still doesn't make it godly.

Nick Roen is a pastor at Sojourners Church in Albert Lea, Minnesota. He has a burden to help the church think through issues regarding sexuality, singleness, and celibacy. He's burdened because he is a Christian who admits same sex attraction. He wrote the following:

Same sex attraction is the result of a broken creation, and in that sense it is "sinful" or "dishonorable" [as we are told in Romans 1:26]. It is an effect of the fall.

However, experiencing same sex attraction is not the same as sinning. Rather, same sex attractions should be treated like any temptation to sin.

They should be fought with blood-earnestness in a way that recognizes the deceitfulness of the heart and the finitude of the mind.

When I do this – when I fight temptation, turn to Jesus, trust his promises, and rely on His Spirit – God is pleased. He is not mainly displeased because I need to fight, but pleased because I am fighting.

This is good news for all of us who experience all manner of temptations! May this fact lead us, no matter our particular groaning, to rest in Jesus more deeply, fight temptation more fiercely, and look forward to the day when our fight of faith will result in "praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1Peter 1:7).

Roan suggests that *sanctified singleness* is the solution we must proclaim:

If we are going to ask those who struggle with same sex attraction to reject their longings for as long as the Lord wills, then we must have a strong theology of singleness that does not present it as simply a transitional stage on the way to marriage. It seems that in many churches, marriage is assumed for everyone, and when it doesn't happen for certain people, they are left wondering if the church is a place where they can truly belong.

"Can I engage in sexual activities with someone other than my spouse?" Nope; and neither can I engage in sex before I'm married, or if I find myself unmarried. It is within marriage that God says you are to enjoy sexual relations, *and nowhere else*.

Of course, people 'can' do all these, and more. If, however, you are claimed by Jesus, then No, **you** can't do them - not without it being sin.

When a person has any of these questions, a good question to ask them is, "Are you submitted to God?" If they are, then these questions are already answered for them.

People proclaim, "God wants me to be happy," as though that settles the matter. God wants you to be **holy** - for your sake. True happiness can only result from holiness, and holiness derives from pleasing God, not from pleasing your own sinful lusts.

Let me stop to explain that there **are** biblical grounds for a divorce and subsequent remarriage. There are at least two.

In the telling of this incident in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus was recorded as saying,

Mat 19:9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, **except for sexual immorality**, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."

Sexual immorality is the more modern translation of the word *fornication*. The word fornication includes premarital sex, incest, sodomy, harlotry, perversion, and bestiality. It is really a catch-all term for all sexual sin, both before and after marriage.

“Adultery” is fornication committed by a married man or woman.

“Sexual immorality,” by a spouse, according to Jesus, **is biblical grounds for a divorce.**

He wasn’t commanding a divorce when there is sexual immorality; only permitting it. Many marriages have survived the sexual immorality of one or both spouses who have repented and been granted forgiveness. Nevertheless, the offended spouse may choose divorce, and is then free to remarry - as long as they marry a believer.

There is one other situation where the Bible establishes grounds for a divorce and subsequent remarriage. It is the abandonment by your nonbelieving spouse. The apostle Paul said,

1Co 7:15 But if the unbeliever departs, **let him depart**; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.

In Corinth, the believers had come to a false conclusion that, if you were married to a nonbeliever, you should get a divorce.

Paul corrected them, saying that if the nonbeliever was content to remain married to the believer, stay married.

If, however, the nonbeliever abandoned the believing spouse, they should not try to stop them from getting a divorce. The believer is not "bound" to that marriage. Afterwards the believer is free to remarry - as long as they married a believer.

It's not always so simple as that. For example, let's say your spouse is involved in pornography. The word fornication is a translation of *porneia*, from where we get our word pornography. Is it grounds for divorce? If you say it is, how deeply must the offending spouse be involved in it?

It's a serious question. We are exposed to pornography almost constantly in our modern world. If I don't pluck-out my eyes when the Victoria's Secret ad comes on, is that grounds for divorce?

What, exactly, constitutes abandonment? What about physical abuse? Or mental, or verbal abuse? Are those abandonments?

And, again we must ask, How severe must they become?

Are you really going to tell a woman being abused to endure it because her dirtbag husband, who professes to know Jesus, won't abandon her and isn't committing adultery?

We can take a page out of Moses' book. **God wants to protect the innocent – never to add to their misery.** He was concerned about the plight of the wife being unjustly put away, and He stepped in to regulate the hardness of men's hearts so she was set free to remarry. He is no less gracious today, under the new covenant.

One conservative but insightful commentator put it this way:

In summary, what are the biblical grounds for divorce? The answer is sexual immorality and abandonment. Are there additional grounds for divorce beyond these two? Possibly. Is divorce ever to be treated lightly or employed as the first recourse? Absolutely not.

Within the framework of the biblical grounds revealed for divorce, we need to struggle with each situation and its unique details, holding to the sanctity of marriage as it was originally modeled, but extending grace to innocents who are the victims of the hard-heartedness of others.

No one ever comes in and says, "I'm going to divorce my spouse without any biblical grounds because I have a heart that is totally hardened against God. I know that it's wrong, but I either don't care, or I'm so selfish that I don't think God's Word applies to me."

When you're casual about divorce, it's a heart problem between you and God - **not** between you and your spouse. Admit it; confess it; repent of it.

#2 If You Are Casual About Divorce, Check Yourself For A Derelict Heart

(v10-12)

His disciples are going to ask Jesus to clarify His answer. He does, and as He does, we get a further insight into the kind of heart that is casual about divorce. **It is a heart derelict of its duties and responsibilities to the spouse.**

Most of the professing Christians I've had to confront over the years about their nonbiblical divorce have been extremely selfish. It's all about them:

- They claim that their spouse doesn't quite live up to their expectations.
- They announce that they are in love with some other person, and since that makes them feel better, then it doesn't really matter how their spouse feels.
- Using hindsight, they think they should not have married their spouse, that it somehow wasn't God's will, so they argue that a divorce gets them back on track to doing God's will.

No one seems to care that they exchanged vows, before God, that were based on willful decisions, and not on selfish desires. "For better... **Or for worse... In sickness...** Or in health... For richer... **Or for poorer....** As long as we both shall live."

In fact, it turns out what they meant was, "For better until it's worse... in health Because sickness is too demanding... for richer and richer... as long as I feel love for you."

Jesus is not so much interested in *feelings* as He is *fealty* - which is a little-used word that means *faithfulness to your Lord*.

Marriage is a promise made to God. Even if you did not make vows to God, marriage is *not* a human institution; it is His creation ordinance for the protection, the provision, and the preserving of the human race. You have a responsibility to God to live within His definition of marriage.

Mar 10:10 In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same matter.

No matter how long you've been a Christian, there are always questions, or things that need clarifying, in terms of exactly what we believe.

Mar 10:11 So He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her.

Mar 10:12 And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

You might be wondering why, since Jewish women had no right to divorce under the Law of Moses, Jesus would mention them divorcing their husbands.

Israel was occupied by Rome, and under Roman law, women had more rights than under the Law of Moses. Mark's Gospel was written with a Roman audience in mind, so his mention of women divorcing their husbands makes sense.

Also, as the Gospel went forward, and out to the Gentiles, this issue would come up again and again among the non-Jews.

"Divorces" here *must* mean "divorces without biblical grounds." It must mean that, because, as we've seen, elsewhere Jesus and Paul establish that there *are* biblical grounds - namely sexual immorality and abandonment.

What Mark's omission is telling us is that the Holy Spirit wants to emphasize a different aspect of divorce. Namely, He wants to emphasize what it does to your spouse.

Jesus says you commit adultery "against" your spouse. It indicates the adulterer **injures** his or her spouse.

Adultery causes injury; it harms your spouse. I was going to talk about some of the pain, but I don't want to cause any of you to relive the pain you've gone through, or are going through, on account of the infidelity of a spouse. I think it's obvious it hurts.

Is that the kind of person you want to be? One who knowingly, unashamedly, injures the person you once promised to care for in any conditions, "til death do you part?"

I would hope you'd say, "No, I don't want to be that person."

Sexual sin, overall, causes severe injury. While you are focusing on the temporary physical and emotional pleasure it seems to bring you, you're ignoring the lifelong pain it inflicts savagely on others.

In a passage about maintaining sexual purity, the apostle Paul warns "that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified" (First Thessalonians 4:6). The idea of "defraud" seems to be that you injure their walk with the Lord by taking advantage of them simply to satisfy your own lusts.

Not sure how the Lord will avenge the defrauded person *but you shouldn't want to find out.*

In the midst of a long passage warning against adultery, the writer of the Proverbs says,

Pro 6:27 Can a man take fire to his bosom, And his clothes not be burned?

Pro 6:28 Can one walk on hot coals, And his feet not be seared?

Then he summarizes, saying, "Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; He who does so **destroys his own soul**" (6:32).

If you think this sounds old fashioned, it might surprise you that adultery is still a crime in twenty-one of our United States. Cases are still prosecuted.

Let me briefly address one concern some of you might have. Let's say you realize that you had no biblical grounds for your divorce and are now remarried. Are you therefore guilty on habitual adultery?

No; you are not. The apostle Paul, addressing some of these complicated issues, advises, "Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called" (First Corinthians 7:20). Today, if you are married, you are to stay in that marriage. If you got there by committing sin, confess it to God, and repent, and thank Him for grace that is sufficient for all of our many sins and failings.

If you are casual about divorce, you are derelict in your marital duties, towards God and towards your spouse. You're likely thinking too highly of yourself, and not as a servant.

Don't be a derelict. Be a disciple.

It comes down to this: "Are you living to please the Lord, or not?"

Answer that question in the affirmative and your marriage will be transformed into a beautiful garden.

