

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

They are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye mistakes can be found. So he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at pastorpat@waukeshabile.org.

Date: July 19, 2009

Title: Teaching concerning Divorce

Text: Mark 10:1-12 (Gospel Parallels – Matthew 19:1-9)

Theme: Marriage is between one man and one woman for one lifetime. Divorce exists because of hard hearts.

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Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.

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Introduction:

This paragraph appears as an intrusion in thought to what has preceded. It does show the continued and open opposition Jesus faced by the religious establishment. They were determined to undermine His credibility and topple His authority. Their question was intended to “test” Him. There was no other reason for asking. The question was asked because of its difficulty. Their hope was to entrap Him.

As an initial qualifier, let us remember that what our Lord states here is not a full or final word. Jesus, in His response, is answering a very distinct question and works inside of a very distinct context. When Paul speaks to marriage in Romans 7 and 1 Corinthians 7, both are not exhaustive responses. They are his response to a specific question. All of these passages compliment a larger idea that we will strive to present in this study. I would, however, caution us as to the finality of this study. We are simply a part of a larger and longer dialogue.

Our Lord’s thoughts are consistent with the larger body of revelation. But His response is only a part of a much larger discussion. I will attempt to work in and from this text the handling of this question.

THE BIG PICTURE:

Jesus’ Ministry in Judea and Perea (ch. 10)

- **Teaching concerning Divorce** (10:1-12)
- Teaching concerning Children (10:13-16)
- The Rich Young Man (10:17-31)
- A Request of Two Brothers (10:32-45)
- Restoration of Bartimaeus’s Sight (10:46-52)

Passion Week and Resurrection Sunday (Chapters 11-16)

The Storyline:

In the story of God, the Hero would be met with heightened animosity. The blood lust against Him would culminate in His death. This story continues to unveil the open animosity of the religious establishment against Him. The topic is only introduced in order to trap Him. How our Lord handles the issue is direct and sharp.

The Problem:

The problem with our passage is twofold. The first is the problem of wrestling the idea from its context. The response of our Lord must be controlled by the limits of the question asked. Secondly, the primary idea of the passage is not on marriage, but on the hatred the religious establishment had toward Him.

This subject is applicable and current.

“The ratio of marriages to divorces is 2 to 1.”

<http://www.biblenews1.com/marriage/marriags.htm>

http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/mardiv_tables.htm

Age	Women	Men
Under 20 years old	27.6%	11.7%
20 to 24 years old	36.6%	38.8%
25 to 29 years old	16.4%	22.3%
30 to 34 years old	8.5%	11.6%
35 to 39 years old	5.1%	6.5%

Regardless as to the percentage, it is way too high. When I look at the age where divorce has its greatest inroad, I am terrified. We must dig in and fight for those who are in the twenty-something age bracket. Every divorce is a difficult journey. **The journey that leads to and ends with divorce is a long and difficult passage.** When a marriage ends in a divorce, it is the conclusion to tremendous hurt and pain.

What Jesus says concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage is true. And in the absence of this question, I believe He did teach on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Yet I believe we would be wrong to conclude that this is all there was to say about marriage, divorce, and remarriage (See further John 21:25).

“And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that *would be written” (John 21:25).

I believe Romans 7 and 1 Corinthians 7 and Ephesians 5 would suggest this idea. Matthew 19 also gives the inclusion of what is known as “the exception clause.”

⁹ “‘And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.’ ¹⁰ The disciples said to Him, ‘If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.’ ¹¹ But He said to them, ‘Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given’” (Matt. 19:9-11).

Matthew 5, in the Sermon on the Mount, also carries Matthew’s exception clause.

³¹ “It was said, ‘WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE’; ³² but I say to you that everyone who divorces his

wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (Matt 5:31, 32).

Jesus appears to suggest that there is a provision for divorce and remarriage. Yet how are we to handle this idea? Although we like to think the Bible speaks with a finality that is non-negotiable, I would like to suggest that the Bible does not always speak exhaustively to every issue we are currently faced with.

I do not believe our current state of marriage, divorce, and remarriage is any different than what has always existed. We are no different than the first century in which Jesus lived. What He says is directly applicable to where we live. It is my desire to explore this area with you.

Questions:

1. What was the pattern of our Lord's ministry based on 10:1?
2. How does Mark portray the Pharisees?
3. Why might the Pharisees bring up the question they did?
4. How does our Lord respond to their questioning?
5. How does Jesus view divorce?
6. How does Jesus view marriage?
7. What does the response of the disciples tell us about their understanding or our Lord's response/answer?
8. Is Jesus negating all divorce and all remarriage? What might help us understand this idea?
9. Does the Bible ever speak in a cultural or historical vacuum? Does it speak in a moral or religious vacuum? How does His answer correspond to the Hebrew Scripture?
10. Why do you think Mark dropped this passage in his narrative?
11. How does this passage relate to the overall flow of Mark's story?
12. What part does this paragraph have to the storyline of the Bible?
13. How might we fight for our marriages?
14. What can we do to strengthen our marriages?
15. If I am single, what should my attitude be?

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know God is for marriage.

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose to remain where we are and find our contentment and rest in God.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of knowing Him as enough and sufficient.

Outline:

It is of interest to note how their initial question was turned on them (v. 2) and from their answer Jesus responds.

I. The Theological Context of Mark 10:4

The Pharisees respond with Deuteronomy 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 indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, ² and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, ³ and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, ⁴ then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since 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 gives you as an inheritance" (Deut 24:1-4).

This is what the text says, but what does it mean? "The Jews of that day generally agreed that divorce was lawful, the only debated issue being the proper grounds for it." (NIV Study Bible on mark 10:2) This is always the struggle we are faced with. What is of interest is the response Jesus gives to their answer. What is of interest is to note how after this response His disciples pull Him aside and ask more questions. This is where the struggle comes when we are confronted by the issues of divorce and remarriage. This is what their understanding of this text was in the first century.

The school of Shammai says:

--"A man should not divorce his wife,
except where he has found in her a case for scandal, as it is said:
--'...because he has found in her a scandalous thing' (Deut 24:1).

For the Shammai school, "A matter of indecency was adultery and adultery alone. Let a woman be as bad as Jezebel, unless she was guilty of adultery there could be no divorce."¹

But the school of Hillel says:

--"(He may divorce his wife),
even if she has burned his supper, as it is said:
--'...because he has found in her a scandalous thing' (Deut 24:1).

Rabbi Aqiba says:

--"(He may divorce his wife),
even if he has found another more becoming than she, as it is said:
--"and if she does not find favor in your eyes" (Deut 24:1).

Mishna, *Gittin* 9.10 ²

The body of a letter (of divorce) is:

--"Behold, you are free (to be married) to any man!"

Rabbi Judah (ben El'ai) says:

--"It should read: Let this be to you from me a writ of divorce, a letter of release and a decree of dismissal, to permit you to be married to any man you desire."

Mishna, *Gittin* 9.3³

It is within this theological context that Jesus places His answer. It will become apparent with whom our Lord sided.

II. What is Divorce?

Up to the very end of His ministry; "As was His custom, He taught them." The topic is divorce. What is divorce? Divorce formally terminates a marriage. It is the legal dissolution of a marriage. In verse two the word used by the Pharisees is **apoluo**. It is a compound word meaning "to release from." It is different than the word used in verse 4. Here it is the neuter form **apostosion** from which we derive our English word, "Apostasy." **Apostosion** is used only three times in the New Testament (Matt. 5:31; 19:7; and Mark 10:4). In all three occurrences it is translated with "divorce." The sister word is translated "forsake" in Acts 21:21 and "apostasy" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 (i.e., "falling away"). The meaning of divorce in Mark 10:4 is explained by the statement, "Send her away."

In divorce, a spouse is released from the covenant established with their husband and/or wife. Either party is sent away. There is a defection from the cut covenant.

Even though God permits divorce, the action exists because of the fall. **Its provision does not necessitate an obligation or requirement.** Had there been no fall there would be no divorce. Divorce is a consequence of sin, and sin produces in the sinner a hard heart. "The purpose of Deuteronomy 24:1 was not to make divorce acceptable, but to reduce the hardship of its consequences."⁴

The word used to describe the consequence of sin, "Hard heart," is made up of two words: **skleros** and **kardia**. **Kardia** is our English word, "Cardia" and occurs with various words: Cardiologist, Cardiac-arrest, Cardiomyopathy, and Cardio-gram. The word **skleros** simply means, "Hard." It can carry the idea of "fierce or strong" (James 3:4). It can also mean "harsh" (Jude 15). A hard heart is one in which the "heart" is no longer responsive. In this context, it is a heart that sits in opposition to one's spouse. The hardness is so severe that divorce happens. All of this is because of the fall of Adam and Eve.

In Matthew 19, Jesus identifies with the School of Shammai as it relates to this topic. This positioning elevated the place of the woman within the marriage covenant and encouraged its permanence.

“Human nature being as it is, it was the laxer view which prevailed. The result was that divorce for the most trivial reasons, or for no reason at all, was tragically common.”⁵

III. What is Marriage?

Yet as Jesus points out, divorce was not a part of the original picture painted prior to the fall.

Jesus goes beyond Deuteronomy 24 and sites Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. “It was his view that in the very nature of things marriage was a permanency which indissolubly united two people in such a way that the bond could never be broken by any human laws and regulations.”⁶

God’s picture was a man and woman uniting together to form a “one flesh” union. This union would be distinct from any prior relationships that existed. The words used to describe this one flesh union are of interest: “united” (v. 7 [the NAS does not include the statement “united to his wife.” The NIV does. It reflects the idea found in Genesis 2:24]), “one flesh” (v. 8), “joined together” (v. 9).

The word used in verse 7, “United,” is a compound word. It takes the word for “glue” (**kallao**) and places a prefix (**pros**) in front of it to heighten or empower its meaning. In marriage, God “superglues” two individuals into a “one flesh” union. This union is so transforming that “they are no longer two, but one.” The contrast established between the “two” and now the “one” is set by a strong contrasting connector (**alla** [v. 8]). The word “joined together” is another compound word. It means, “To yoke with (v. 9).”

God’s picture of marriage is the coming together of two individuals to form a new union whereby the two quite literally become “one.” It is in the mystery of this union that we have pictured the union Christ has to His church (Eph. 5:31, 32). **Although the finite fallen picture is incapable of capturing completely the reality, it does speak to the weight of what one does when they enter into covenant with another.** The only reason this union can be severed through a renting of the one flesh is by a hardness of heart. It is because of sin that divorce takes place. **Had there been no sin, there would be no divorce.** Although provision is made for a divorce to take place, **its availability does not necessitate its certainty. Just because it can happen, does not mean it should happen.** All of this appears to be straightforward.

In light of the historical context, His answer was appropriate to the immediate question and then for the sake of His disciples He provides a fuller explanation.

IV. What does this mean for me?

Like so many of us, we want to know what this means for me. As was their “custom” the disciples needed further explanation as to what this meant on a “practical” level (Mark 4:10, 34; 7:17; 9:28). What our Lord says next emphasizes the strength of the “one

flesh" union. **It is because of sin divorce exists.** If one puts away their spouse for the purpose of another individual, then they are committing adultery against their first spouse.

In Mark 10:11 and 12 the words "commits/committing" are present passive indicatives. In Matthew 19:9 the words are present middle indicatives. In Matthew 5:32 the words are present middle indicatives. It is important to put this in the context of Herod Antipas and Herodias and that of John the Baptist (Mark 6:17-20). I believe the immediate application of what our Lord said in the context in which it was said spoke directly to this scenario. The Pharisees were trying to get Jesus "to say something about divorce which can then be presented as treasonable."⁷

What is Jesus saying? **If you leave your spouse for the purpose of marrying another, you are committing adultery.** What is Jesus not saying? Jesus is not saying all remarriage because of divorce is adultery. This much is clear (Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:12, 15). **Divorce is not an unpardonable sin.** Whatever issues exist in the marriage relationship, God's pre-fall purpose is for couples to endure and work out their concerns by seeing the sufficiency of Jesus. Their ability to survive and exist in a difficult context speaks to the grace of God. The context is different, but the idea is the same in 1 Corinthians 1:8-10. God places us in difficult circumstances so that we would not rely on ourselves but on Him who is enough. Yet divorce does happen. And it happens because sin exists. It is a reality that marks our existence.

The word Jesus spoke attacked the prevailing mindset concerning divorce and remarriage. This same word is to be spoken today. The marriage covenant is to be celebrated and fought for. **Divorce, although present, is not a solution to the problem.** Its existence and provision does not necessitate that such be the outcome. Yet despite one's efforts and desire, it can and does happen.

We must fight for marriage. We must believe that God is enough in this life and in the life to come, in marriage or in singleness. Grace says that we are to love without condition, accept without requirement, forgive without limit, and serve without reward. Grace must abound in the context of relationships. Let us not forget the cross. Were sin abounds, grace does much more abound.

"The real essence of the passage is that Jesus insisted that the loose sexual morality of his day must be mended. Those who sought marriage only for pleasure must be reminded that marriage is also for responsibility. Those who regarded marriage simply as a means of gratifying their physical passions must be reminded that it was also a spiritual unity. Jesus was building a rampart round the home."⁸

What is the community of faith to do in the face of this particular difficulty?

First, recognize it for what it is. It is there because of sin.

Second, look past the sin and seek recovery of individuals in and through the community of faith.

Third, believe the impossible. God can choose to do what He wants with what is His and when He does, it is always right. What God can do and what He wills to do are often significantly (and dramatically) different than what we think He should or must do.

In God's triumphant march toward the cross, He continues to show forth the majesty of His Son's person and work. Jesus is enough despite our best efforts to argue otherwise. **His response to the Pharisees accents His authority over the Pharisees.**

Shepherding the Sheep (What's the NEXT STEP?)

1. Regardless as to whether or not you are single or married, fight to find your satisfaction and rest in who God is, what He has done and is doing, and who you are in Him.
2. If you are married, fight for your marriage. Work to rest in God.
3. If you are divorced, work to rest in God.
4. Regardless as to whether or not you are single or married, learn to forgive knowing God is in control and that He truly cares.
5. Let us as a fellowship receive those who have been divorced and remarried. Let us see this sin like all sins and believe it is forgiven and complete restoration is possible.

¹ William Barclay, *Mark*, 239.

² <http://virtualreligion.net/iho/purity.html>

³ <http://virtualreligion.net/iho/purity.html>

⁴ NIV Study Bible on Mark 10:5.

⁵ William Barclay, *Mark*, 239.

⁶ William Barclay, *Mark*, 240.

⁷ N.T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, 131.

⁸ William Barclay, *Mark*, 240.