

### The Lord's View Concerning Divorce

#### Mark 10:1-12

Mark 10:1-12 – *“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.*

<sup>2</sup> *The Pharisees came and asked Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” testing Him.*

<sup>3</sup> *And He answered and said to them, “What did Moses command you?”*

<sup>4</sup> *They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to dismiss her.”*

<sup>5</sup> *And Jesus answered and said to them, “Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. <sup>6</sup> But from the beginning of the creation, God ‘made them male and female.’ <sup>7</sup> ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, <sup>8</sup> and the two shall become one flesh’; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. <sup>9</sup> Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”*

<sup>10</sup> *In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same matter. <sup>11</sup> So He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. <sup>12</sup> And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”*

#### Background Notes

The Lord left Capernaum, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and traveled south toward Judea and Jerusalem. He went via an area on the other side of the Jordan River known as Perea, on the trans-Jordan side or the eastern side of the Jordan River (v1).

This is significant to note, particularly in view of verse 2, which says the Pharisees were testing Him. Our Lord was teaching the people, as He was accustomed to do, and the Pharisees came to “test Him” in the territory of Perea. This territory was under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas. Remember him? He’s the ruler who beheaded John the Baptist, because John had denounced Herod’s divorce and adulterous marriage to Herodias (Mark 6).

So the Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus. If He were to come down hard on divorce, this might incur the wrath of Herod Antipas. And Herod’s anger might lead to our Lord’s death - a situation that would have pleased the Pharisees. On the other hand, if the Lord took the subject of divorce lightly, He would lose the support of His followers - the common people, who were more conservative on this matter. So the Pharisees tested Jesus. They were trying to trap Him.

The Pharisees themselves were split on this matter of divorce – not whether it was legal, but about the grounds for divorce. One strict school of interpretation said that adultery was the only acceptable ground for divorce. The view of the

more lenient school of thought was that divorce was justified for just about any reason - even if a wife didn't cook the food the way her husband liked it! (Read this in the ancient Jewish literature.)

The Lord answered all these questions by going back to the creation ordinance of marriage - marriage as **God intended** it - any departure from this constitutes adultery. Look at verses 11-12 once again, "*So He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."*

Notice from verse 12 that Mark wrote for a much wider audience than just Jewish readers. The custom of women divorcing their husbands was not widespread in Judaism, but it was practiced in the Roman culture.

## **Doctrinal Points**

### **1. The Bible does not condone divorce.**

This is an important point, because many Christians today no longer believe this. Go to your Christian bookstore, and I can just about guarantee that you'll find a Christian author who says that God views your happiness as more important than maintaining an unhappy marriage. That's exactly what was going on with Jews in Old Testament times. Ever since the nation had come out of Egypt, where they had picked up the practice of divorce, they were divorcing for any and all kinds of reasons. And they were using the Old Testament Law as the excuse!

Here the Lord corrected their wrong thinking on this matter. The Law did **not condone** divorce - it only **regulated** a sad situation that was going on. Our Lord said that it was because of the hardness of their selfish hearts that God had to give this regulation. The regulation was actually to protect the woman. In no way did it condone divorce.

This regulation is given in Deuteronomy 24. "*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...*" Some translations are a little misleading here, because it sounds like the law says that if a man finds some "uncleanness" or something "indecent" in his wife, he should write a bill or certificate of divorce. It sounds like that's the law - but no, that's not the law. Those were the *conditions* that were prevalent. The law that comes in verse 4 was to regulate the situation. "*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, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife, 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, 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.*"

So the law comes in verse 4. It does not condone divorce. Rather, this law protected a woman from being passed back and forth, and treated like a piece of property.

The Old Testament Law in no way condones divorce. God did not change His mind over the years. The prophet Malachi, at the end of the Old Testament period wrote, ***“I hate divorce, says the Lord.”*** In New Testament times, our Lord discussed the subject of divorce, and He did not condone divorce. The Bible does not condone divorce.

At this point, some of you may be wondering: What about the (so-called) “exception clause” in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9? There the Lord says that divorce was wrong except in the case of fornication or sexual immorality. There are a number of views of this “exception clause” but one thing is sure: it does not say that God condones divorce.

Even when there has been unfaithfulness in a marriage, God is pleased with forgiveness and reconciliation rather than divorce. Marriage is designed by God to reflect the relationship between Christ and His Bride, the Church (Ephesians 5). Aren't you glad the Lord doesn't divorce us when we're unfaithful to Him? The Bible does not condone divorce.

## **2. God designed marriage to be heterosexual, monogamous, and permanent.**

First of all, God designed marriage. It's not something mankind invented as a convenient way to live. No, **God** designed marriage! And notice that marriage is to be heterosexual: *“From the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female”* (v6). Male and female, Adam and Eve (not Adam and Steve, as is sometimes said).

By the way, this verse certainly refutes evolution, doesn't it? *“But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.”* Mankind didn't gradually evolve and become male and female. No! Humans were created as male and female from the **beginning of creation** – not after millions of years of evolution or “progressive creation.”

Marriage is also to be monogamous. *“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife [not wives], and the two [not three or four] shall become one flesh; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh”* (v7-8). Marriage is to be permanent, as God designed it. Verse 9, *“Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”*

## **Practical Applications**

### **1. Your marriage might be better if you “leave” your father and mother.**

This application is particularly for young couples that might be struggling in this area. At first this might sound unbiblical – your marriage might be better if you leave your father and mother! But look again at verse 7: *“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife.”* It's a quote from Genesis 2:24.

To “leave” does not mean to dishonor. That would be unscriptural. We’re to honor our parents. And it doesn’t mean leave because you’re mad or you can’t get along. It means to leave because you’re *a new unit*. In marriage, the two become one in God’s sight. Just as there is a special blood relationship between a parent and child, so in God’s sight there is a special binding relationship between husband and wife. As a new unit, it’s better to “leave” father and mother. This doesn’t mean you have to move out of state, but you do have to recognize that when you’re married, you’re a new autonomous unit – a husband-wife unit before the Lord.

Many marriages fail because this principle has not been practiced. The parents and in-laws begin to manipulate the young couple and the marriage. While the “chain of **counsel**” is still there, and consulting your folks is often helpful, the parent to child “chain of **command**” no longer holds. Husband and wife are to make the decisions now, not parents or in-laws.

Those of us who are parents and/or grandparents - let’s remember this principle! Don’t try to run our married children’s lives, or our married grandchildren’s lives. It’s important to remember that principle. Young couples - your marriage might be better if you “leave” your father and mother.

## **2. Be willing to let God change your mind about your spouse!**

In the marriage counseling that I’ve done, this is one of the greatest barriers that I find - the husband or wife is unwilling to let God change their minds about their spouse. They often say, “The romance is gone.” Or “He’s so different now.” Or “She doesn’t appeal to me any longer.” Or “We’re not ‘in love’ any more.” When I ask the man or woman if they’d be willing to ask God to change their attitude about their spouse, they’re reluctant – or their answer is no! For example, a husband once told me his wife was now overweight and therefore she was no longer appealing to him. When I asked him if he would be willing to ask God to change him so that he would begin to think she didn’t look unappealing, he was reluctant to even consider asking God to change his attitude.

Be willing to let God change your attitude – that’s the bottom line! God can do it! He can change us. He can work miracles here.

Are you having marital difficulties? Are you willing to pray: “Lord, I must admit that I am finding it hard to stay in love with my wife / my husband. He/she no longer appeals to me as he/she once did. I admit that I don’t want to change. I want out of this marriage. But Lord, I’m willing to have you change me - whatever it takes to change - because I want to obey You in this area.”

If you take this attitude, miracles really can take place in your marriage! Be willing to let God change your attitude about your spouse!