

Marriage and Hard Hearts

Mark 10:1-12 (06/28/15)

Ernie Godshall
Faith Bible Church
Evansville, Indiana

Mark 10 takes us to a discussion about the most fundamental, bedrock institution of all societies, marriage. Can you believe that while I was preparing this message at 9:36 Friday morning (6/26/15), I got a notification on my Ipad, "Breaking News: Supreme Court rules 5-4 that same-sex couples can marry in all 50 states!" Well, five men and women in black robes may rule that way, but it does nothing to change what God says in the Bible.

To say this is a hot topic is the understatement of the year. We knew the water was heating up, but we didn't know it would be boiling so furiously so quickly. And not only is the secular culture revolting from God's plan and design for human flourishing, but churches are too. From San Francisco and across the land, churches claiming to be evangelical are changing their tune and beginning to accept practicing homosexuals and same sex couples as members and performing weddings of same sex couples. Books pro and con are pouring off the presses trying to get a handle on this warp speed revolution. We have jumped off the cliff into mass confusion and moral darkness. This is a hill Bible believing Christians must be prepared to die on.

We as believers have to be very clear. God is a forgiving God regardless of the nature and flavor of your sin! We want people dealing with gender issues to hear the gospel and be saved, just like we want people with any sin issues to be saved. True believers are not homophobes or haters, just as we're not divorcephobes or gossipphobes. We love Jesus and we love people and we are compelled to speak the truth in love regardless of the sin and point them to the cross.

This morning we're talking about marriage and divorce, but in the process Christ clearly lays out the divine pattern of marriage. It is crystal clear, and always has been for thousands of years. But I'm so glad the Pharisees asked Jesus this question about marriage and divorce. It gives us the opportunity to fine tune our understanding of marriage.

First, God wants us to be thoroughly aware of what the Scriptures say about marriage and divorce – vv. 1-5

1 Getting up, He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them. 2 Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. 3 And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" 4 They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." 5 But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment."

Jesus leaves Galilee for the last time. He is headed for Jerusalem. By Mark 11 they are ready to enter into Jerusalem. Now He's on the other side of the Jordan, and notice, v. 1, He begins to teach them. He was constantly bringing God's Word to souls. They may not have believed Him, but He taught them anyway. That's what we do. We are constantly teaching the Word and we need to be learners all a long. One of the huge problems in the churches is ignorance of what the Bible really says, what it really means, and the authority it holds over our lives. That's why congregations can be manipulated into accepting practices without raising a fuss. They so easily turn away from the truth and turn aside to myths. We need to "let the Word of God dwell in us richly." (Colossians 3:16)

Now the Pharisees pop a "gotcha question." The media loves to do this. I recall in a 2007 debate, Wolf Blitzer asked Governor Huckabee a gotcha question about creation. You've got to be on your toes. "Governor...the specific question is do you believe literally it was done in six days and it occurred 6000 years ago?" I remember thinking that this has nothing to do with the presidency. Huckabee answered well, considering the context, "I wasn't there! He did it and that's what's important."

Here's the Pharisees' question: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" These Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus into offending someone no matter how He answers. They were in Herod Antipas territory and John the Baptist lost his head over telling Herod he was wrong for marrying his brother's wife. Plus, there were two Jewish schools of thought about marriage and divorce. Rabbi Hillel, who pretty much held the day, said a man could divorce his wife for just about any reason: burning the toast, going around with loose hair, flirting with men, talking too loudly in their house. Rabbi Shammai had been a student of Hillel's, but broke away and took a stricter view that adultery or some moral issue was the only basis of divorce. It went back to Deuteronomy 24:1 which said if a man found something indecent in his wife he could send her away, but had to write out a certificate of divorce to protect the woman in that culture.

So they thought they had Jesus fried right here. If he says "No, you cannot divorce" he is opposing Moses and offending Herod, and if he says "Yes, you can divorce" he can be charged with pandering to the lusts of men. I love how Jesus responds to these verbal traps. Remember Rand Paul's reply to Debby Wasserman over abortion? "Ask her if she thinks it's okay to kill a 7 pound baby in the womb?" Jesus does something similar as He turns the question back on the Pharisees, "What did Moses say?"

So of course they go back to Deuteronomy 24:1-4, "Moses said it was okay," like this proves everything. In verse 5 Jesus points to the real issue in their thinking. "God allowed it because of your hard heartedness." In all marriage problems, there is some hard heartedness. Somebody's not getting what they want, or getting what they don't want. They are focused on self and "I'm not happy here" so cut her off, send her away, she's not pleasing me. When marriages are faltering, one or both have dug in with hard-hearted pride or bitterness or selfishness. And some guys are so hard-hearted they'll just say, "Okay, I've had it. I'm not putting up with this anymore." They'll trash the marriage and the family for their own selfish desires.

So this law was God's way of handling what was already a sin and protecting women from hard-hearted men. Chrysostom, an early church leader, thought God allowed this to keep men from killing their wives whom they came to despise.

Marriage is up for grabs for us too, in areas besides same-sex marriages. God designs stuff and we destroy it. God designed marriage for our good. Almost all cultures have followed that original design, but we distort God's design. Whether it's digital or outright sexual behavior outside of marriage which God calls fornication, or cohabitating without following God's plan of entering a sacred covenant, or polygamy, or homosexuality and lesbianism, or easy divorce, or opting out of marriage because I'm not getting what I expected, I didn't know she was like this or he was like that, all are distortions of God's design.

There is no question that marriage problems are extremely difficult. Many in this room have gone through the pain of divorce either in a marriage or as kids watching and hearing parents fight and then split. Marriage isn't easy. You've got two sinners dragging years of habits into the most intimate relationship possible and you expect everything to run smoothly without any wrinkles? It won't happen; there will be wrinkles and bumps to navigate through. But God's plan isn't divorce, even though there may be situations where it becomes inevitable. But let's go on. Jesus gives us the answer, but not by debating possible reasons for divorce.

Christ clearly defines marriage for all peoples for all time – vv. 6-9

6 "But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. 7 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, 8 and the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

- Back to Genesis 1-2 "But from the beginning of creation."

This is why I'm so glad these guys asked Jesus this question. Where does Jesus go to explain marriage and divorce for these people? Does He go to anthropology? To philosophy? To surveys and statistics? To anatomy? He will get to anatomy, but where does He go first? He goes back to Genesis! Bingo! This proves He believed Genesis 1 recounts the beginning of the universe. He would sign the document that the earth was formed and filled in six literal days. He should know. He's the One who created the

whole shootin' match! "By Him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible!" (Colossians 1:16)

And He believed Genesis 1 was true and authoritative to explain marriage for us. Marriage is sacred. Before we go further, think about it. Here's a brand new universe, a brand new pristine earth teeming with dazzling life, and then God creates two brand new human beings made in God's image and tells them to be fruitful and multiply. God is all over marriage. This is the first thing He talks about. This is momentous. It's absolutely glorious. There's no way to measure what marriage really means. And we learn later, the man/woman relationship in marriage is a mirror to reflect the Christ Church relationship. But marriage is of God and has the aura of God all over it. Every marriage, whether saved or not, inescapably reflects this design of God.

- Male and female – Genesis 1:27 "God made them male and female."

Then, as He defines marriage for us, He emphasizes that these two people were a male and a female. They were different, yet both bearing God's image. The words He uses for male and female speak of their gender differences.

Let's read Genesis 1:27-28 again, carefully. *God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

God defines marriage and life for us. That's why we need the Bible. Throw the Bible out and you've got what we've got in our culture! The moral core is melting away. Right is determined by how I feel, based on my attractions, my desires. But the Bible gives us the origins of marriage right here, God's design, God's first focus, and He defines marriage as between two created beings who reflect His image and who He designed to be alike but different. Two genders, two beings capable of reproducing! Whatever same sex arrangements are, they are not marriage. Here's a profound thought: Marriage is God's way of bringing babies into the world!

People in black robes, no matter how high up they are in the judicial system of our country, do not define marriage and neither does anyone else besides God. It's His idea and any fiddling with it is flat out rebellion against our Creator. Rosaria Butterfield was a lesbian professor at Syracuse University. She was befriended by a pastor and his wife and God used their display of kindness to draw her heart to Christ. I've heard her testimony several times. The point she makes is that it wasn't that the Bible forbade lesbian relationships so much as that there was a God who stood over us telling us what we should do and how we should identify ourselves. That's what our culture despises. That's the heart of rebellion against God.

- Covenant relationship – Genesis 2:24 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother (and cleave to his wife). And the two shall become one flesh."

Jesus jumps seamlessly from Genesis 1 to Genesis 2 in verse 7. The man was alone. He needed a helper who was fitting, a "kenegdo," someone who would stand in front of him and correspond to him. She was different, yet the same. She would complete him in every way, including the capacity to reproduce and nurture children. This is God's gift to Adam, just like your wife is a gift from God – Proverbs says so. You better treat her well!

"Leave and cleave." The parent child relationship is temporary. You're rearing those kids to leave the nest, not stay forever! No 38 year-old son should be living off dad's nickel and playing video games in the basement. And here we see God forming this glorious being called woman from Adam's rib. He then brings her, the woman *Ishah*, to the man, *Ish* (Hebrew words for man and woman), and they become one flesh. This is the covenant of marriage. This is sacred. This is the most important and most foundational relationship among men. Not all marry, but most do. If you are single, God blesses you as well. Matthew 19:5 adds "holds fast to his wife – the Greek word is glued together. When you get married, you are glued together."

- One plus one equals one – “they are no longer two but one.”

Here we’re at the very core and essence of marriage. Two people leave parents, stick to each other, and weave their hearts and lives around and into each other. They are like two eggs scrambled together into an omelet. Try to take that apart! If you are getting married, you will no longer be your own person. You’ll be one flesh with this person. Check him out. Do you really want that? And note this: two males cannot become one flesh. It is impossible. One flesh includes the ideas of sexual intimacy with the potential of reproduction. That precious little image bearing child born out of your union is your flesh! Both of you are in one! Wow! Paul says husbands are to nourish and cherish their wives like their own bodies because their wives are one flesh with them.

- God acts in marriage “What therefore God has joined together....” Jesus has said all of this to come to this fact: whenever a man and woman are joined in sacred marriage, God is there doing something. What’s He doing? He’s joining that male and female in a permanent lifelong relationship. As they make their vows and enter into this sacred covenant before God and others, as they promise each other they will be faithful until death brings about their separation, as that is happening, God is acting. God is joining them together. Every time we have a wedding here, God is here doing what He does in every marriage – yoking the couple together.

- Man must not tear apart what God joins together “let no man separate.” When God joins stuff together, we’ve got no business tearing it apart. Then after saying this, Jesus just walks away! BAM! End of discussion! That’s your answer, Pharisees! This is marriage. Where does divorce fit in this? God’s design, between a male and female, leaving, cleaving, and weaving, one flesh, joined together by God Almighty! That’s marriage. Anything else is not marriage.

Christ warns us about divorce – vv. 10-12

10 In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. 11 And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; 12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

- Absolute commitment to faithfulness in your marriage. Jesus blew His disciples away, again. “Lord, explain to us what You just said.” So Jesus tells them clearly for a man or a woman to divorce their spouse and marry another, they are committing adultery against their first spouse. Marriage is a permanent relationship. Divorce is a serious matter. Don’t enter marriage lightly! There may be situations where divorce is inevitable – a spouse who continues in an adulterous relationships, a spouse who deserts his or her wife or husband, when there is clearly physical danger and abuse going on, either with the wife or with the children. Sadly, in this fallen world, divorce may be the only answer. But listen, folks, let’s not go there first. First, rejoice in God’s design for marriage and how God is all over it! Look at your marriage and spouse and praise God for them. Perhaps you have been divorced and are remarried; now you are responsible to be absolutely committed to your present spouse. Do all you can to honor Christ and make that marriage flourish.

Questions about whether God allows remarriage for the innocent partner after a divorce are difficult to answer and good men differ. I have my opinion and practice on that and would be happy to talk about it privately. I don’t want to either encourage sin or lay a personal conviction on someone when I may be wrong.

SO WHAT? Philippians 2:3-5 – Unselfish humility feeds a flourishing marriage.

If you are a husband, live with her in an understanding way. Honor her, love her as Christ loved the church, nourish and cherish her as you do your own body. If you are a wife, do him good all the days of your life, submit and respect him, encourage him with warm, affirming love, and develop a gentle and quiet spirit, which God says is precious. Wrap around all this the Christ-like spirit of Philippians 2:3-5, in humility esteeming one another as more important than yourself, looking out for her or his interests above your own, just like Christ came looking out for our interests and went to that cross to lay down His life in amazing love so you and I might have forgiveness and eternal life.