

Mark 10:1-12
June 13, 2010
Lynchburg, Virginia

EXHORDIUM

The Pharisees come to Jesus to try Him. That is, they are trying to catch Him in His Words. They want to trip Him up, cause a problem for Him, accuse Him, discredit Him. They have tried this before and will try again but Jesus always turns the tables on them. He answers but not in the way that they expect.

The question they put forth, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?” seems to be a legitimate question. We still struggle in the church today to speak clearly on the issue of divorce and especially of divorce and remarriage. In order to do so, we must keep all of Scripture in mind, not just the few texts that we have in the New Testament.

Furthermore, we need to keep in mind some Bible study principles. First, always interpret the difficult texts through the lens of the clear texts. Second, stay close to the original intent of the author and of the speakers.

Just as it would be wrong to take the words of our founding fathers and twist them into something that they did not mean, so it would be wrong to twist the words of Jesus into something that He did not mean. If we take them out of their original intent, the issue that Jesus is dealing with at hand, then the words begin to take on a new meaning. This is simply careful and honest Bible study.

Jesus does this very thing with the Pharisees as we shall see.

Today, we deal with a passage on divorce, or of putting away. But before we ever get to divorce, we need to have a good grasp of marriage.

EXEGESIS

¹And he arose from thence and cometh into the borders of Judaea and beyond the Jordan: and multitudes come together unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again.

This teaching is done in the open with multitudes coming together. Jesus clearly wants the crowd to understand what He thinks about marriage and divorce. No surprise that the views of Jesus are in stark contrast to those of the Pharisees.

²And there came unto him Pharisees, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away *his* wife? trying him.

Mathew's version of this question helps us get a better idea of what is going on. In this passage it is clear that they are trying Jesus. That is, they are trying to catch Him in saying something contrary to their tradition. They think that their tradition is the Biblical teaching. However, Jesus answers them in such a way as to turn the tables.

Matthew 19:3- The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

It is important that we note this difference. The Pharisees were not simply and honestly asking, "What is the Bible's teaching on divorce?" That would have been fine. They come to 'try Jesus'. They are subtle and we have to grasp the subtlety of the question.

Calvin says that this is another one of the clever questions of which there was no way for Jesus to answer without being caught.

If He says, "No, you may not divorce," then they have Him directly contradicting Moses and the Law. If He says that you can divorce for any reason as long as you give a writing of divorcement, then He is questioning God's creation mandate. They had formed this question this way.

So, we need to keep in mind the context. Jesus takes them back to school. He is not here giving teaching on the special cases of divorce and the nuances that may apply there. He is slapping the Pharisees in the face for refusing to submit to God's holy creation ordinance.

God has a high view of marriage and they have a low view.

³And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? ⁴And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.

Jesus is not asking what the Pharisees think He is asking. However, He asks the question this way knowing how they will answer. They have already interpreted the Bible in a particular fashion that suits their wicked desires. They are not teachable on this point. When Jesus says, "What did Moses command you?" He is asking what does Moses teach in the Bible? We know He is asking this because Jesus then gives us what Moses taught in Genesis.

The Pharisees answer reveals their heart on the issue. They hear the question, "What did Moses command you about divorce? But Jesus is

asking, “What did Moses command you about marriage?” They are thinking in terms of how do I get out of this. Jesus is thinking in terms of how do you stay committed to God’s ordinance and your vows.

Jesus wants to know what the Pharisees know about marriage. The Pharisees want to know what Jesus knows about divorce. They are like two ships passing in the night. They are going opposite directions and at least one of them has no idea they are going the wrong way.

If the Pharisees had a better understanding of the Biblical view of marriage, then their desire for no-fault divorces would not have been an issue.

The reality is that they were filled with lust and desire. They grew tired of their wives and put them away. A certificate of divorcement was for protection for the women. If a hard-hearted man put away his wife but could not prove that she was sexually unfaithful to him, he had to give her a writing of divorce. This means that she was the innocent party. He put her away unjustly. So, Israel had twisted even Moses’ intentions, and Moses required that the men give the woman a divorce certificate to protect her.

Adultery was a capital crime. Remember the woman caught in adultery? But the culture was run by men and no man was going to be stoned for adultery. But a woman might. So a writing of divorce protected her, showing that it was not for adultery but other causes.

⁵But Jesus said unto them, For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.

The Pharisees speak as if they have a Biblical right to divorce their wives whenever they want to. This is easy ‘no-fault’ divorce. But that is not what the Bible teaches. In fact, the Bible even seems to teach staying in some marriages when it seems unreasonable to do so. Think about the example of a believing wife staying married to an unbelieving husband. The Bible encourages this, even though we would all agree that such a woman will never be fulfilled in her marriage. She can never even share her deepest thoughts and soul-searchings about Jesus, the Father or the Spirit. What is most important to her can never even be shared with her husband. Nonetheless, St. Paul says that even though a woman has a technical right to leave, she ought to stay with her husband in such cases.

It is clear that divorce is always a matter of sin. The sin is usually from two parties but sometimes it stems from just one and the other party is

innocent. While this is rare, it does occur. But Jesus is attacking men here. He is saying that the men had hard hearts towards their wives.

Jesus takes them back to school. And this is where we need to go, too. Before we start dealing with the difficult issue and the exceptions to the rule, we need to understand the rule. Why do sinners always run to the exceptions? Because they are trying to make the exception the rule.

Abortion- against unless rape, incest or danger to the life of the mother. So, is such a person against abortion? No, not at all. A total liberal can agree with that level of against abortion. Cases of rape or incest simply allow abortions. What does danger to the life of the mother do? Well it gets stretched all over the place. She has a medical problem and she could die in pregnancy or childbirth. She gets post-partum and is therefore a depression risk. That may lead to suicide, so her life is in danger. The baby will not allow her to finish high school or college and that puts her at a socio-economic risk. So, in all situations, abortion becomes a legitimate option. Here's the thing. Are all of the reasons given to kill a baby true? Yes, they are. Such a mother is at risk. But does that justify the killing of the baby? No, not at all.

The principle should be, "Thou shalt not murder." But what about self-defense? War? Capital punishment? Accidents? Etc. Well, "Let's get the rule down first."

The rule on abortion is, "Thou shalt not kill." Thou shalt not slaughter the innocent. What about the exceptions? Wait. Stop. Do you know the rule? Don't make the exceptions the rule.

Jesus gives us the rule of marriage so that we don't get caught up legislating all the exceptions for divorce. Let's get the rule, especially you men.

Here it is: **⁶But from the beginning of the creation, Male and female made he them. ⁷For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; ⁸and the two shall become one flesh: so that they are no more two, but one flesh. ⁹What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.**

Jesus reiterates creation ordinance. Pharisees wanted to use the Moses loophole as the rule. But Jesus makes it clear that divorce is an exception not a rule. It is sometimes necessary due to sin but it is not the norm.

The rule is: Man and woman, husband and wife, for life. When a man and a woman is married in the sight of God, God has joined them. And what God has joined, man should not separate.

But what about? Hold on. Let's not start on the whatabouts. Did you hear me. What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

Calvin interprets this joining together and the solemn ceremony in the sight of God and witnesses. We do not have to make it super spiritual. In fact, we know that it is not so. We are not just talking about soul mates who found each other and they were perfect. We are talking about good marriages, bad ones, unequally yoked (even though the Apostle says not to do this), and mediocre marriages. These are all unions that God has joined together.

The rule is, "God has joined, Let no man put asunder." One marriage for life. If this rule is broken, there needs to be discipline. Nobody gets to break God's rules with immunity. As I said before, there may be an innocent party in a divorce, although rare. But in every divorce, at least one of the parties is guilty of a sin or sins that require the elders to be in the middle of thing for counsel and formal discipline. The failure of the church to do this has created this Pharasaical mindset in the American Church.

¹⁰And in the house the disciples asked him again of this matter. ¹¹And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her: ¹²and if she herself shall put away her husband, and marry another, she committeth adultery.

This passage needs to be read and understood in the larger context of the Bible. At first reading, it seems to prohibit all divorce and remarriage. But that cannot be the case because we have other clear passages that teach about divorce and remarriage among Christians.

Furthermore, we cannot simply take the NT teaching. We have to take into account what Moses taught and how that applies in the New Covenant era.

Jesus is still addressing the creation mandate and how the Pharisees read the text. There are exceptions but His purpose here is to keep pushing the principle. So, let us do the same.

EXHORTATION

Before we deal with divorce and the even trickier question of divorce and remarriage, we should firmly brand the principle into our minds. We have to get the principle burned in there permanently, or we will always want to make the exception the rule. We think we are so much better than the Pharisees but when we start to think like them, we should check ourselves and reboot.

Let's get the principle. In the beginning, before the Fall of man, God created a man, Adam and his wife, Eve. They were to marry and have sexual relations becoming one flesh. That relationship was to exist for the entire lives. Adam lived 930 years. We are not told how long Eve lived. But that is God's plan. Husband and wife for hundreds of years. And they died before their time, right?

For the Pharisees and even for Jesus's disciples, this situation seemed intolerable. Better not to marry then. Jesus does not agree with them. He wants them to marry and to be obedient to the creation mandate.

But, we protest. What if she? What if he? Well, wait, stop. Before we run to any special pleading, did you hear what the Scriptures tell us? God has joined, let no man put asunder. This is good and right.