

Marriage Matters - II
 What God Has Joined, Do Not Separate.
 Mark 10:2-12
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² And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” ³ He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” ⁴ They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” ⁵ And Jesus said to them, “*Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. ⁶ But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ⁷ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, 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 not man separate.*”

¹⁰ And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹ And he said to them, “*Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, ¹² and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.*”

The Gospel of Matthew 19:

³ And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?” ⁴ He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? ⁶ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” ⁷ They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” ⁸ He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. ⁹ And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

¹⁰ The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” ¹¹ But he said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. ¹² For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.” Matthew 19: 3-12

In the year 1972, a couple by the name of Nena and George O’Neill published a book titled “Open Marriage”. This book became an overnight sensation. It was on the New York Times best seller list for about 40 weeks and supposedly sold millions of copies. This book emphasized honesty, personal growth, and open communication in a marriage.

There was one chapter that suggested couples (in a traditional marriage) be open to relationships outside. The book proposed that jealousy should be a thing of the past.

What do you think the fallout was? It was disastrous!

The authors found out that couples who bought the idea of an “open marriage” paid a heavy toll emotionally, psychologically and who knows what else.

Why? Because the human heart longs for love, security and fidelity over so called freedom.

Open communication and honesty in a marriage does not mean you compromise marital faithfulness. You see this is the problem in our world. Brokenness. It’s so broken that sinful people invent, promote and incentivize new ways to sin.

There is no freedom without boundaries. God knew that about Adam and Eve. We are no better than the first couple.

So, these authors had to retract their position and divorced later.

This is why the Bible can be trusted over any other book.

The foundation of society is marriage.

When the foundation of marriage breaks down, the family breaks down, the community pays and the nation suffers.

The Pharisees claimed to be followers of Moses but some of them were really children of the devil. (John 8:44 – “*You are of your father the devil*”). The devil loves to tear marriages apart because he loves to steal your joy and destroy the family.

God hates divorce. Malachi 2:16. Why? Because divorce is against God’s very nature.

God is faithful. God is grieved when his people are prone to wander into unfaithfulness.

The question then and now is not if divorce is permitted, allowed and legal. Of course it is. The Pharisees allowed and advocated it. In our day and age, no-fault divorce is quite legal and cheap.

The antidote to our divorce ready culture (sadly in Christian circles) is to hear, understand what Jesus teaches and apply them for life.

There is only one command in this passage. That command is in verse “*What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.*”

You have the same command in the Gospel of Matthew. After the disciples heard what Jesus taught, they were so unsettled that they told Jesus they rather not marry.

So, as we hear Jesus’ teaching divorce and marriage, I realize that this subject may be uncomfortable or unsettling. My prayer is that this is a redemptive and transformative message.

So, before we expound verses 9 through 12, here are some affirmations about marriage.

- Affirmation#1 When we say marriage, we are talking about a Christian marriage. Jesus has in mind two Christians - one male, one female, joined together into a lifelong, monogamous relationship. Christian marriage is distinctively different and unique from any other marriage. In the secular world, two people can make vows to each other, which is great, but not necessarily include God. But a Christian marriage is different. How? A Christian marriage is a covenant, authored, conducted under the purview of God and witnessed by God. That is why Jesus says in verse 9, “*What therefore God has joined together.*” That is what you believed when you exchanged your vows.
- Affirmation#2: The husband and wife are two forgiven sinners who have been joined to honor Jesus Christ *first* and then each other. You are first *united* with Christ before you have been united to each other. When you look at the first marriage after the Fall, you can see shame, blame, fear and loss of relationship with God. So, when two Christians are married, remember that Jesus Christ took all your sins upon himself. Jesus took your shame. Jesus took your blame. Jesus took your disobedience. So, Christian marriage essentially is a redeemed marriage, a holy matrimony. It is made holy by Christ in the center.

With these affirmations let’s cover verses 10 through 12 before we get to verse 9.

¹⁰ And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹ And he said to them, “*Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her,* ¹² *and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.*”

Jesus teaches that divorcing and remarrying *can* cause you to sin. Jesus does not list any exceptions in verses 11 and 12. Some observe that Jesus is using hyperbole or rhetoric. Maybe but Jesus says the same thing in the Gospel of Luke – “*Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.*” Luke 16:18

Now, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus does list exceptions.

“*It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’* ³² *But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery*”. Matthew 5:31-32

“*And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.*” Matthew 19:9

Notice, Jesus teaches by saying, “I say to you”. That is very important. Because, in the first century, there were two major schools of Rabbinic thought regard divorce – The

school of Shammai and the school of Hillel. Shammai was conservative holding to Deuteronomy 24:1 citing *indecency* of the wife as the only probable cause for divorce. Hillel was less conservative than Shammai and allowed divorce for any cause. Jesus is well aware of these views. That is why Jesus says, “I say to you”.

What should we say in light of Jesus’ teaching in Mark, Luke and Matthew?

If two Christians desire to divorce or divorce citing incompatibility, irreconcilable differences, or the couple find out the wife is barren and cannot produce children, or you find out your spouse has your pet peeves after marriage, or any other reason, these are not Biblical grounds for divorce and they should be repented of.

Here are Biblical grounds for divorce:

- Sexual immorality: Jesus permits divorce (according to Matthew 5,19) for sexual immorality but does not require it. The word immorality is a very broad word. It could mean anything from indecency to adultery.
- Physical abandonment: Paul writes to the Corinthians church that a non-Christian spouse who voluntarily leaves a Christian spouse may be a ground for divorce (1 Corinthians 7:15). Physical abuse or severe neglect by a Christian spouse could be construed as abandonment.

Outside of these grounds, Jesus says that any divorce and remarriage amounts to adultery. Jesus had already pointed out why Moses allowed divorce. Due to the hardness of heart. A hard heart can come up with any reason it wants to in order to get a divorce. God is in the business of joining people in marriage and blessing them by softening their hard hearts. The first step must be repentance and reconciliation not a readiness to divorce.

The real question is how important is marriage to God. Verse 9 really is the most important verse in this passage.

When we understand God’s view of marriage, I think we have a much better shot at keeping this covenant of marriage than any other expectation.

⁹ What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

The first part of this verse is crucial to understand the second part.

When Jesus says “*What therefore God has joined*” he teaches this in light of verses 6 through 8. We had covered these verses two weeks ago.

⁶ But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ⁷ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, ⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh.

God made male and female in the beginning. And God desires the man should leave other relationships to make the marriage relationship, the new *priority* relationship. And that the marriage should become the *permanent* relationship, and that marriage should be the only *permission* for a holy and intimate relationship. In light of all this, Jesus says God joined both of them. God was witness at your marriage.

The word *joined* is the word *yoke* as in the yoke of an oxen. Two people are yoked when they are married. And they begin their life together.

In light of this wonderful yoking together marriage, Jesus says the next part, *let not man separate*.

This is the only imperative and command in this passage. Here is a plain way to say verse 9 – “*What God has yoked together, man must not separate*”

- Jesus says that man or woman must not separate what God has joined.
- Man or woman has zero authority to separate what God has joined together.
- It’s as if God had himself had performed the wedding. Therefore, you and I have no authority to separate whom God has joined.

Paul in Ephesians 5:32 says “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church”. Jesus is faithful to his bride (the church). In spite of the many acts of unfaithfulness by his bride, Jesus never abandons his church. Rather, Jesus loves his bride, the church, and gave himself up for his bride and sanctifies her.

Five implications as we close:

1. Implication #1: Even if divorce and remarriage have been part of your life, remember you a child of grace not condemnation. So, stay in the marriage by cherishing what God cherishes – faithfulness.
2. Implication #2 - If you are newly married, know that by virtue of getting married, your marriage is already a sign of God’s blessing. And God intends to bless you more and more in ways you have never imagined. Give yourself to prayer for your spouse regularly and pray regularly together as a team. Let grace fill your marriage.
3. Implication #3: If you are contemplating marriage, take time to know that God desires to bless you when you enter marriage.
4. Implication #4: If you desire to be single, let your singleness be maximized for God’s glory. Remember you are already united to Christ.
5. Implication#5: A Christian marriage is a display of the Gospel! Marriage is the divinely ordained plan of God where the two greatest commandments - Love God and Love your Neighbor are practiced. Love God first. And love your neighbor. Your spouse is your first neighbor.

Christian marriage is discipleship in action. Grow as disciples together. And make other disciples – both biological and spiritual.

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. ¹⁵ As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” Hebrews 3: 12-15

May the Lord bless his Word!

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Marriage Matters - 2. Mark 10:2-12

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. In verse 9, Jesus teaches that "God has joined together", why is it crucial to understand this part before we hear Jesus' command?
2. HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.
 - In what way(s) do you believe God has joined you and your spouse when you were married? Mark 10: 6-8. What implications do you see in light of Jesus' command "Let not man separate"?
 - What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

3. HEART For personal reflection: What will you do to uphold and promote God's design for marriage?