

**The Memoirs of Peter**  
**Jesus on Divorce (Part 2)**  
**Mark 10:1-12**  
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*Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher*  
*Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas*

Well, tonight, we come to the Word of God again and to look specifically at what our Lord teaches about divorce because we find ourselves in Mark 10. I invite you to turn there with me. Mark 10 as we continue our way through this wonderful gospel; almost now to the last week of our Lord's life. But here on His way to Jerusalem Jesus teaches about divorce. And He does so in response to a question.

I remember my own first encounter as a young man growing up with divorce. It was when my brother wanted to marry a woman who had divorced her previous spouse. And I remember overhearing hour after hour of conversation between my brother and my parents about whether or not this was biblically acceptable and whether or not the divorce itself was biblically acceptable. In those days Christians were hesitant to allow divorce or to accept it when it occurred. Today divorce among Christians has reached epidemic proportions. In my lifetime there were times when it was a scandal when a Christian sought an unbiblical divorce. But today there is essentially no scandal whatsoever. How did that happen? How did this sort of revolution in the Christian world happen?

Well, I think there are several contributing factors. Certainly, the influence of the secular culture in which we live with its no fault divorce has contributed. I think Christians are poorly taught the Bible, and so they don't really understand what God has to say about marriage and divorce. I think that's another factor.

But I think there's another sort of subtle factor particularly in the Bible belt. I think author and sociologist Robert Bellah was right in his 1985 best seller called, *Habits of the Heart*. In that book, he maintains quote "that there is a visible tendency in many evangelical circles to thin the biblical language of sin and redemption to an idea of Jesus as the friend who helps us find happiness and self-fulfillment." Let me read that again. Listen carefully to what he says. "A visible tendency in evangelical circles to thin the biblical language of sin and redemption ..." to

thin that to an idea of Jesus as friend who wants us to find happiness and self -fulfillment. That's exactly right. That is the culture of the Bible belt in many ways. So, if my marriage isn't making me happy, then surely Jesus doesn't want me to stay in a marriage and be unhappy. He's my personal happiness genie.

I don't remember a clearer example of this attitude, this mindset, than Christian female vocalist, Amy Grant when she pursued her divorce. In 1998 when she ended her first marriage to marry number two, she said that she understood that God hates divorce but that she had found a more freeing truth. She told her husband and her pastor back in August of 1998 quote "I believe and trust that I have been released from this marriage. And I say that knowing that even the Bible says the heart is deceitful." So how did she know this? How did she know that she had been released? Quote "To the best of my level of peace I had a very settled unshakable feeling about the path that I was going to follow." Well, you think maybe she got some good counsel. Afraid not. Her counselor encouraged her in her decision with these words. This is a Christian counselor. "Amy, God made marriage for people. He didn't make people for marriage. He provided this so that people could enjoy each other to the fullest. I say if you have two people who that are not thriving helpfully in a situation, remove the marriage." end quote.

That's the mindset of the Christian world, the evangelical world in which we live. It copies the secular culture. But the question is always what does the Bible say? And specifically, tonight what does Jesus say about divorce? Let me read you this text. Mark 10:1.

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. *Some* Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and *began* to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce ... [His] wife. And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses permitted *a man* TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND HER AWAY." But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation *God* MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND

THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH so they are no longer two but one flesh.  
What therefore God has joined together let no man separate.”

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

In this passage Jesus unfolds God’s mind to us about marriage; about divorce; and about remarriage. If we could reduce God’s perspective specifically on divorce (which is the central question here) to a simple sentence, God’s perspective would be something like this: God hates divorce, and He will not allow it among His people with only two exceptions.

Now, I want us to unpack that and unfold that from this passage. Jesus’ teaching on this issue of divorce is, first of all, prompted by a surprising question about marriage and divorce. It’s surprising because of the context, both the historical context as well as the cultural context. And we looked at this before the Christmas break and had a chance to unpack it. But let me just remind you about the historical context.

To put this chapter in context you have to understand a lot of things happened between the end of Mark 9 and the beginning of Mark 10. There’s a lot that Mark doesn’t record. In fact, Mark is missing almost six months of our Lord’s life and ministry between the end of Mark 9 and the beginning of Mark 10. In the white space between Mark 9 and 10 you have John 7 - 11, you have almost a third of Luke’s gospel, Luke 10 - 18:14. And you have a full five and a half months.

As Mark 10 begins, Mark has fast forwarded from the fall of 29 A.D. where we end chapter 9 to the spring of 30 A.D. And we find Jesus as we begin chapter 10 headed to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, His last one, the feast at which He will be murdered. Although He was only about 13 miles north of Jerusalem when it was time for the feast to be celebrated (you see Jerusalem there in the lower green), He traveled north up into Galilee up to the Sea of Galilee; joined a sea of pilgrims coming for the feast of Passover; came down the Jordan rift with them; crossed over

to Jericho and then over into Jerusalem. Because He wanted to come into the city as we'll see in a few weeks for a particular reason **on** a particular time.

So, that's where we find ourselves from a time standpoint. Mark 1 - 9 covers three years five and a half months of our Lord's ministry. Mark 10 - 16 all of those chapters cover about two weeks in His life and ministry. Obviously, it's the central point in His life and ministry.

So, Jesus is now in Perea in that yellow area there just to the east and north of the Dead Sea. He's in Perea journeying with the crowds of pilgrims to Jerusalem for His final Passover. In that context that historical context, notice verse 2, some Pharisees came up to Jesus testing Him and began to question Him. Over the last five and a half months that Mark doesn't record for us, the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees had seriously ratcheted it up because of a series of confrontations between Jesus and them. Those confrontations are recorded in those passages in both John and Luke that I pointed out to you. And now on the way to Jerusalem the Pharisees come to Jesus in the middle of the crowds with a question to test Him; to put Him on the spot; to try in some way to discredit Him. That's the historical context of their surprising question. But there's an equally unusual, cultural and theological context as well. Notice verse 2.

"They came up testing Him, began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife." Now, as we pointed out the last time the rabbis were agreed that divorce was an option. The only question was on what grounds for what reasons were legitimate. In fact, Matthew records that question like this, "Some Pharisees came to Jesus testing Him asking Him if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all." Now, don't read that question as we don't believe divorce is acceptable at all. That's not how you should read that question.

Instead, as we discovered last time, there were two rabbis who had sort of polarized this issue and people had sort of lined up behind their views. There was Rabbi Shammai who taught that the only legitimate reason for divorce was unfaithfulness in marriage. But then there was the more popular, and there were many who followed the more popular liberal Rabbi Hillel who basically taught that you could divorce your wife for just about any reason. If she burned your food, if you didn't find her attractive anymore, and on and on the list went. Essentially, for any

cause at all it was acceptable to divorce. That's where this question comes from. Because that's what Hillel taught, and that's what many of the leaders and teachers of the time believed. That essentially you could divorce for any reason at the drop of a hat. It didn't matter what it was. You were free to pursue divorce. That's the background. Really a surprising question. Both historically and culturally about marriage and divorce.

Now, that brings us up to date to where we want to begin tonight. We come to verses 3 - 5, and we see in these verses the common sinful view of marriage and divorce. And we see it through the response of these spiritual leaders in Israel. The Pharisees betray a sinful propensity towards divorce that frankly continues to today among many Christians. They emphasize the exceptions to get out of marriage more than marriage itself. Look at verse 3. In response to their question, Jesus answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" I love that. Jesus says what does the Bible say? My father-in-law, who taught theology for fifty years and is now with the Lord, that was what he hammered into his family, hammered into me as a student. What does the Bible say? Doesn't matter what I think, doesn't matter what you think. What does the Bible say? And that's what Jesus asked them. What does the Bible say? Specifically, what does the Mosaic law teach? Jesus is really saying what specific guidance does Scripture provide on this issue? He's calling for positive instruction about marriage and divorce. And look at their response in verse 4. It's pitiful. **They said** Jesus says, "What did Moses command?" They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." They quote here from Deuteronomy 24:1 - 4. And they're right! Moses did permit a man to write a certificate of divorce and divorce his wife. That is what Moses said. So, what's the problem with their view? It's a matter of emphasis. God had spoken definitively about marriage and its permanence. In addition, He had allowed for or permitted divorce.

The Pharisees instead of focusing on the instruction, the positive instruction about marriage, they were stressing the exception. It's another example of the Pharisees (and frankly all legalism) of missing the big point. You remember what Jesus said to the Pharisees? He said you know you tithe your herbs, but you forget to love God. You're always getting the little things right and missing the big things. You should do both. And here's another example. They get the exception right, but they miss the big picture of what God says.

Instead of seeing Deuteronomy 24 in its context, they turned it into a pretext for divorce and for remarriage for any reason at all. They used it as their “get out of marriage free” card. And the same thing happens today even among Christians. How does it happen? It happens when Christians downplay the sinfulness of an unbiblical divorce. It happens when Christians manifest an eagerness to get a divorce and to sort of manipulate the biblical passages to get their way. I’ve seen this again and again.

There’s an example even from here in Southlake. There’s a Christian counselor here who wrote a book on divorce and marriage and has hung his shingle here in Southlake. He teaches that abandonment by an unbeliever, that clause in 1 Corinthians 7 when an unbeliever says I want out of the marriage, he includes emotional abandonment by a professing Christian in that text. That’s a lot of stretching.

Christians minimize what God says about divorce and marriage when they pursue other relationships before church discipline against their sinning spouse takes its course or even the divorce is finalized. They’re looking around and pursuing other relationships before they’re even done with that marriage. Christians are overly eager to seize the first shadow of a reason to get out of their marriages because it’s too hard. It’s not emotionally satisfying. They’re missing the big point of Scripture.

So, if the Pharisees here were missing the point of Deuteronomy 24 what does it mean? Turn back to Deuteronomy 24 because this was where they were really clinging to in terms of their justification in terms of their position. I want you to see what it says. Let me read it to, and then I’m going to make some preliminary observations. Deuteronomy 24:1. Here was the basis for everything they taught. That a man could divorce his wife for any reason at all.

“When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she find 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, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man’s *wife*, 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, *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.”

You say wow. What does that say? Well, it doesn't say what they were trying to make it say. Let me just make some preliminary observations about this passage. Number 1 (and I think this is clear to you) this passage is not primarily teaching about the biblical grounds for divorce. That's not the main point of the passage.

Secondly, it really doesn't comment on the morality of divorce. It's simply tolerated here and regulated.

Thirdly, this passage acknowledges that divorce will occur in Israel.

A fourth observation is this passage primarily deals (and this is the big picture with a specific case), specific circumstances that could happen if there's a divorce. Notice verses 1 - 3 are the “if” statement, the protasis as it's called, the condition. And verse 4 is the “then” statement, the apotasis the conclusion. So, if all conditions of verses 1 - 3 are met then 4 is true. So, it's a very, very specific case that God is addressing. He's making the big point, however, that when there is divorce it gets messy.

Number five, we could say this passage provided a protection for the one who did not initiate the divorce. This passage requires that when there is a divorce, there must be a written bill of divorce. Why? Well, the bill of divorce authenticated the end of the marriage. It protected especially the woman from false accusations. Think about this for a moment. In a culture where adultery could get you stoned, a hateful husband could say, “I'm done, we're divorced. You need to get out of here.” She leaves, gets involved with someone else, and the husband says “she's in adultery.” And so, the bill of divorce provided protection from false accusations.

And thirdly it confirmed the freedom to remarry. In fact, the Jewish Mishnah has nine chapters on the certificated of divorce and all that's included with that. It stated that the certificate given to the divorced wife read this. As one of the lines, "You are free to marry any man." End quote. So, this is what this passage is doing.

Now one last observation. This passage does leave open the possibility that there might be a legitimate reason for divorce and remarriage. The key issue though is in a phrase in verse 1, "... if he finds some indecency in her." What does that mean? Literally the nakedness of a thing. If he finds in her the nakedness of a thing, what does that mean? Well, there are two common interpretations of what that means. One is that divorce was allowed only for a sexual issue short of adultery. In other words, the nakedness of a thing wasn't adultery. They would argue, look adulterers would be stoned. So, this can't be talking about adultery. It must involve some other form of sexual sin or deviation that wouldn't get you stoned but that you could then divorce for. That's one view.

A second view is that it's talking about adultery. If he finds out she's been unfaithful. And therefore, this view says that divorce here is allowed only for adultery. This view argues that there is no record that all adulterers were stoned in Israel. Read your Old Testament. There's no record that that happened all the time. Or that they were even commanded to be stoned in every case. Jesus Himself, you remember, allowed an adulterer to live. In fact, the only clear examples in the Old Testament of when someone is stoned for adultery is when they're caught in the act. In addition, there were circumstances, (you can tell where I'm leaning here), there were circumstances in which divorce for adultery was a righteous choice. Read that line again.

There were circumstances when divorce for adultery was a righteous choice. The most notable one I think is Joseph. What does it say in Matthew 1? "... Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to divorce her secretly." He thought she'd been unfaithful. She's pregnant. Her story is an angel showed up and told me I was going to be pregnant. Joseph's response is, see how that story works for you. That's not a believable story. And so, he plans (as a righteous man) to divorce her secretly. Not to seek to have her stoned.



But I think the most compelling example is God Himself. Look back in Jeremiah, the prophet Jeremiah. Here we learn that God uses the divorce word for His own relationship with Israel. Jeremiah 3:6,

When the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, “Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a ... [prostitute] there. I thought, ‘After she has done all these things she will return to Me’; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister, Judah, saw it. And I saw for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ [or bill] of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; ... [and] she went and was a harlot also.”

You see what’s happening here? God is describing Himself in His relationship with Israel. He says, I was married to her. She was unfaithful to Me again and again and again spiritually unfaithful to Me, and so I divorced her. I gave her a bill of divorce, and I divorced her for her adultery.

Now clearly God divorced Israel for spiritual adultery not physical adultery per se. But nevertheless, God (by His own actions here) establishes the righteousness even in Old Testament times of divorcing an unfaithful spouse. So, although we can’t be certain what this phrase in Deuteronomy 24 means, the nakedness of a thing, I believe it probably is referring to adultery and allowing divorce because of adultery. So, if a man divorces a woman because she’s been unfaithful, let’s put all of Deuteronomy 24 together. If a man divorces a woman because she’s been unfaithful, she goes and marries another man, and then the second husband dies or divorces her, that woman can’t return to her first husband and be remarried to him. That’s what Deuteronomy 24 is teaching.

The problem here is that the Pharisees had taken this passage as if it were God’s primary teaching about marriage and divorce in all the Scripture. They had enlarged it into a massive loophole in the marriage covenant. They had emphasized the exception rather than the rule and the result was chaos. Because think about any other area of life. You don’t become a good pilot by spending all of your times practicing crash landings. You don’t become a good soldier by

only practicing retreats. And you don't fashion a lasting marriage if you're always trying to leave yourself an out.

So, Jesus here sets them straight. Look at verse 5. Jesus says, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment." Divorce was permitted only because of their hard hearts.

What does that mean? The Greek word Jesus uses is a compound word from which we get two English words. The first one is "sclera", we get sclerosis from it hardening like hardening of the arteries. And "cardio" meaning heart. A sclerosis or a hardening of the heart. This phrase is used primarily of people's attitude toward God. So, hard-hearted refers to rebellion against God. The question is what were they rebelling against? They were hard-hearted in what sense?

Well, it could be they were hard-hearted in the sense that they were refusing to stone the guilty party when there was adultery. They were hard-hearted toward God soft-hearted toward people. I mean, after all, think about it. If the guilty party in adultery were stoned as God commanded, divorce was unnecessary. But their refusal to stone for adultery made divorce necessary to legally end the marriage and allow the innocent party to remarry. It may mean, hard-hearted, may mean that they were rebelling against staying permanently in their marriages. In other words, the people were divorcing so God had to regulate it for the protection of the spouse who would initiate a divorce. Or it may mean that their hard-heartedness was continuing in unrepentant adultery against their spouse. They were hard-hearted.

Jesus now is going to explain. Understand this. What happens in allowing divorce is because of men's rebellion against God. So, here Jesus is going to teach us what marriage is really all about. The way marriage is supposed to be. That brings us to our Lord's teaching on divorce and remarriage. We've seen the convoluted way the Pharisees looked at marriage and divorce.

Now Jesus is going to set the record straight. Jesus had asked them what Moses had taught. They had picked an obscure case law from Deuteronomy. Jesus now takes them back to Moses's inspired account of creation. And from that account Jesus teaches us about marriage.

The first thing He teaches us is that God established the place of marriage as part of creation. God created marriage. Jesus starts, notice, by taking us back to the beginning. Look back in Mark 10:6, “But from the beginning of creation....” In other words, before the fall, back in Genesis 1 and 2, back to the purposes of God in creating marriage. And Jesus here quotes from two passages in early Genesis. We’ll look at those specific passages in just a moment, but don’t miss Jesus’ larger point. He’s going to take us back to the first two chapters in Genesis, and there He’s going to show us how God established marriage. Marriage is not a social construct. Marriage is not something man created. God, in fact, the second person of the Trinity, the Eternal Son, performed the first marriage between Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden on the sixth day of creation. And He even created mankind with marriage in mind. God established marriage. It was His plan.

Now, God has both providentially and practically given some the gift of singleness. First Corinthians 7 describes that. The fact that they’re not married doesn’t in any way make them second class citizens. That’s God’s purpose and plan for them. But marriage is God’s plan for a great number of people on this planet.

And it is only the teaching of demons (Paul says in 1 Timothy 4) that demand that people abstain from marriage. If you find somebody saying, no you shouldn’t get married you shouldn’t get married; it’s more holy to stay single, then understand ultimately according to 1 Corinthians 4:3 that that is the teaching of demons. By the way, the rumor that marriage is dead is greatly exaggerated. I know you hear and read these stories that you know marriage is going down the tubes. It’s not going to exist in a couple of generations. No, Jesus Himself prophesies that when the end of the world comes, people will be marrying and giving in marriage. It’s not a social construct. It will endure to the very end of the age because God established the place of marriage. Marriage was made in heaven.

The second thing Jesus teaches us in this passage is that God established the parameters of marriage. First of all, the participants. Who’s going to be able to be involved? Look at verse 6. “But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female.” Here He quotes Genesis 1:27. When God chose to make mankind, male and female, in a way that they both emotionally

and physically correspond to each other, God was making it clear that marriage was His plan. And that marriage would be between male and female.

Now this is so clear that we use this same language in everyday commerce. Go to your local Home Depot or Lowe's, and there you will find many electrical parts, some of you don't want to go to Home Depot or Lowe's; it's like my favorite thing to do. But you'll find many electrical parts and plumbing parts that are designated as guess what? Male and female. Why is that? To show that they were made for each other. Two males don't work. Two females don't work. It takes a male and a female to complete the union. It's axiomatic. **It's** part of life.

And that's what Jesus is saying by quoting Genesis 1. He's saying God had marriage in mind when He made them male and female to correspond to each other. This is God's plan, and the only acceptable participants are male and female. He also says here the acceptable number. Notice verse 8, "And the two shall become one flesh. They are no longer two but one flesh." When God instituted marriage, He made only two, Adam and Eve. The first marriage He performed was between two people, a male and a female. Adam and Eve. For Adam, God created one woman not a harem.

In fact, the first case of polygamy recorded in Scripture is in the reprobate line of Cain, a man by the name of Lamech who was also a murderer, and he took two wives in Genesis 4. It's true that bigamy existed among the patriarchs. And it's also true that in Deuteronomy 21, it's regulated but not condoned. By far the biggest problem with polygamy in the Old Testament was with Israel's kings during the period of the monarchy and of course Solomon being the greatest example. They copied the kings of the surrounding countries. And so, to make political alliances, they married the daughters of the leaders of those other countries.

But read Samuel and Kings carefully, and what you'll find is during that period of time you won't find a single record of a commoner being married to more than one woman. Regardless, though understand Jesus' statement here is definitive, it's very important. Because it means that although God graciously withheld judgement on the polygamy of Old Testament, believers it was never God's intention. From the beginning it was not so. God made them male and female,

and He made them two to become one. So, the parameters of marriage are very clear, Jesus says. Male and female and only two; one man and one woman.

Jesus goes on to say that God established the priority of marriage. Look at verse 7, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother.” By the way, in the typical Israelite marriage the man continued to live in or near his parents’ home. They still do that sometimes today in the Middle East. The man will simply add on to his parents’ home like an apartment or a condominium, and his family will live in there and move in there. It was the wife who left home to join her husband. So, what does this mean? Well, the Hebrew word translated “leave” here is often translated “forsake.” So, I think that’s the preferable translation here. To forsake or to abandon. A man shall forsake or abandon his mother or father. Not in the absolute sense but in the relative sense.

This is Moses’ point: if you are married, you are to be so committed to your spouse that in comparison it looks like you have forsaken your father and mother. In marriage relational priorities change. Before marriage our first obligation is to our parents. Afterwards our first priority is to our spouse. Marriage brings a new primary relationship. Your relationship to your spouse is to take priority over your relationship to your parents. Let me say that again for some of you who are younger and newly married. It’s so easy to forget this. In God’s design, when you said I do, your spouse became the most important human relationship in your life. And your commitment to that spouse, to your husband or wife, is to be so great that by comparison it looks like you have abandoned your parents. It’s hard to do if you don’t have this mindset, and you don’t make conscientious choices to make this happen.

Now obviously you don’t abandon your parents. Our responsibility to honor them, to care for them, to even provide for them in old age etc. is still there. So, that’s not what the Scripture is saying because we are commanded to do that. It’s saying it’s talking about a mindset. You enter marriage with a mindset that your relationship to your spouse is the most important human relationship you have; taking precedence even over that with your parents. God established the priority of marriage. At the very beginning in Genesis 2 when He performed the first marriage.

Number four, God established the permanence of marriage. Look at verses 8 and 9. “And the two shall become one flesh so that they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let no man separate.” Now notice the first part of verse 8 is still part of the quotation from Genesis 2. The second part of verse 8 is Jesus’ own personal commentary on that text. And then verse 9 is Jesus’ application. So, let’s look at what He says here.

First of all, look at the quotation, “the two shall become one flesh.” One flesh is clearly designed to express that which is both permanent and indivisible. You are glued together. You have become permanently attached. You are indivisible. Marriage is not merely a contract like what you have between you and your bank. Something happens in marriage where the two become one. You are permanently, indivisibly connected. D. Edmund Hiebert writes, “The two form one complete whole. It is not a business partnership that may be dissolved at will but a union of two lives fused into one.” Then notice Jesus’ commentary on that text (second half of verse 8), “So then they are no longer two but one flesh.”

Marriage so binds two human beings together body and soul that they become a part of each other. I’ve said many times, and Sheila and I’ve talked about it the longer you’re married (and some of you have been married longer than I you understand this), the longer you’re married, it’s hard to tell where you end, and your spouse begins. You begin to finish each other’s sentences, to know what the other person is thinking without them describing it. You become one. This isn’t merely the ideal. Jesus says this is reality. This happens according to Jesus with every marriage.

Now look at His application in verse 9, “Therefore what God has joined together let no man separate.” Jesus makes a couple of wonderful points in that verse. One is that He draws a beautiful word picture of the nature of marriage. Look at the word “joined together.” In the Greek text, literally, it means to be yoked together in the same yoke. God in marriage puts us together with our spouse in the same yoke so that we’re now working together side by side, accomplishing the same purposes, moving toward the same goals. We are yoked together. That’s why, you remember in Corinthians it says, don’t be unequally yoked with an unbeliever. We are yoked together; working together beside each other sharing the labors and joys and troubles of life.

But notice Jesus applies the point here, “Therefore what God has joined together...” This means that God created marriage to permanently join a man and woman to each other. I think it probably also means that marriage isn’t really a civil activity. You know the government manages marriage. You go, and you have to get your marriage license, and you have to evidence that you’ve been legally married and the government sort of manages that. Listen the government has no real right to deal with marriage.

Oh, I’m not saying you shouldn’t get your marriage license. I’m just saying it’s not within their parameters. God is the One Who made marriage, and He, apparently (according to this text), is involved in each legitimate marriage. In other words, as one author says, “Every marriage is made in heaven.” What God has yoked together let no man separate. No human decision should undo the permanent union God has created in marriage. Man is not the lord of his marriage; woman is not the lord of her marriage.

God is the Lord of our marriage. And He intends marriage to be permanent. That’s why John Calvin called marriage “the sacred knot.” John Murray in his classic book on divorce writes this,

Divorce is contrary to the divine institution. Contrary to the nature of marriage and contrary to the divine action by which the union is affected. It is precisely here that its wickedness becomes apparent. It is the sundering, the tearing apart, by man of a union God has constituted. Divorce is the breaking of the seal which has been engravened by the hand of God.

I want you look at one other text as we finish our time together. Turn to Malachi. As the Old Testament period ended there were major issues that needed to be addressed in Israel. But one of them had to do with divorce. Look at Malachi 2:13.

“This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts *it with* favor from your hand.” [In other words, you’re crying, you’re weeping.

Why doesn't God receive our sacrifice, why isn't He listening?] "Yet you say, 'For what reason?'" [Why? Why isn't God receiving our sacrifice?] "Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth..." [that is the woman you married in your youth] "... against whom you have dealt treacherously though she is your companion and your wife by covenant."

By the way there's a beautiful description of marriage. Our spouse is our companion and our wife or our husband by covenant. You made a legally binding promise before God when you stood before God and witnesses and said I do, and I will. God says I am witnessing that you have dealt treacherously with your companion and your wife by covenant. Verse 15,

"But not one has done *so* who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did *that* one *do* while he was seeking a godly offspring?" [Now notice verse 15 has several little side margin notes in it. Look at verse 15's side margin notes if you have the NAS. Did he not make one although he had the remnant? And why one? He sought a godly offspring. He made one woman for one man, and He intended that the relationship be permanent. Why? Part of the reason is for a godly offspring.] "Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth." [Why? Notice verse 16. Underline it star it.] "For I hate divorce," says the LORD, ... God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong." ... [Basically it pictures divorce like a person who's a murderer who in killing his victim stains his own garments with the victims' blood. God says you bring that kind of guilt on yourself when you pursue an ungodly and an unbiblical divorce.] For I hate divorce ... "So, take heed to your spirit that you do not deal treacherously." [God is into permanent marriage.]

So, here's the mind of God on marriage. Jesus gives it to us very clearly. God established the place of marriage as part of creation.

God established the parameters of marriage, male and female and only two, one man and one woman.



God established the priority of marriage. You are to make that the highest relationship human relationship in life.

God established the permanence of marriage the two become one indivisibly inseparably. God joins them together in one yoke working together for life and no man should take the prerogatives of deity and rip apart those whom God has yoked together for life.

Now, next time we're going to look at the two biblical exceptions that allow a Christian to divorce and remarry with none of the guilt that we have read in this passage. But I don't want you to miss the forest for the trees. The reason there are two small exceptions is that there is one massive rule. God hates divorce. It was never the divine intention. God created marriage. God did not create divorce. What God has joined let no man separate. Apart from the biblical exceptions, it is a sin against God to divorce and remarry. Both.

At the same time let me just say that perhaps there are some of you here who have an unbiblical divorce in your background. You know that it wasn't biblically justified. Maybe it was before Christ in which case it's so clear that if any man be in Christ what? He's a new creation. That's gone. Paul was a murderer before Christ. It's gone. That's not an issue.

You say well my unbiblical divorce was after I came to Christ. Well, that was clearly sin. But the wonderful thing about sin is we have a God who forgives sin. It means you have to take your sin seriously. It means you have to acknowledge that as sin, deal with it as sin, seek God's forgiveness and perhaps (wisely carefully certainly if you're married again or your previous spouse is married again wisely and very free from any risk of being tempted to sin) you need to seek that person's forgiveness. And if neither of you has remarried; if that former spouse is a Christian (you obviously don't need to remarry an unbeliever that would be a sin as well). But if you, if neither of you have remarried, and if that former spouse is a Christian, then perhaps you need to work towards reconciliation of that relationship.

But if you're in another marriage, and you've been unbiblically divorced as a believer, then believe in the Lord's promise of forgiveness, confess your sin, love your current spouse, and be devoted to that spouse for life as the Lord commands. If you're married, and you've never been divorced, then reaffirm to your spouse maybe tonight before you go to bed that you are committed to marriage for life. That whatever problems may come, to honor Christ, you will work it out.

If you've never been married, but you're hoping one day to be, commit now that you will not go into marriage looking for an escape clause. God created marriage, and He created marriage for life. One man one woman for life. Jesus says that's the divine design.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for how clear Your Word is. Lord, we are always amazed at that. It seems like every time we come, the Word unfolds before us, and we see it in its clarity, and we see Your wisdom unfolded before us. Father, thank You for the wonderful gift of marriage. Thank You that, in Your providence, You created marriage as a blessing to us and as a profound picture of the love of Christ for us.

Father, I pray that You would help us to reflect that model in our marriages. Father, I pray for those here tonight who have an unbiblical divorce in their background. Lord, if it was before they came to Christ, I pray that You would help the forgiveness that they know in Christ the justification that they have in Him to sweep across their souls and to bring peace. Lord, remind them, and may they remind themselves that they are the recipients of Your grace.

Father, I pray for the person who was unbiblically divorced after they came to Christ. Lord, help them to take that sin seriously. If they've not already, to confess it freely before You, to admit the wrong, to seek to do whatever would be right to seek the other person's forgiveness. Or perhaps even to be reconciled.

Father, I pray for those of us who enjoy the blessing of marriage. Help us tonight to commit before You, to resolve before You, that we will be true to the covenant we've made. Not by our strength but by Your strength, by the strength of the Holy Spirit enabling us to love and to care for to grow with one another until we're in Your presence.

We pray it in Jesus' name and for the honor of His great name and love for us the church. Amen.