

 **Main Street**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



**Mark 10:1-12**  
**“High Hopes And Hard Hearts”**

February 9, 2014  
(5<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Epiphany/ Marriage Sunday)

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**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

MARK 10:1-12  
"HIGH HOPES AND HARD HEARTS"

In A Larger Section On Discipleship, 8:31-10:52

1) v.1 Jesus As Teacher: Public Teaching To Crowds.

Earliest Teaching, 1 Cor. 7:10-11

Typical Intro: 2:13, 4:1, 6:34, 8:34

1 And he (Jesus) left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, Ever Closer To His Death  
and crowds gathered to him again; *Perea (Herod Antipas' Marriage: Serial Monogamy, John's Death)*  
and again, as his custom was, the taught them. 2:13, 16, 24; 4:1, 6:34, 8:34, Jesus' Habitual Practice: Teacher  
Form Of vv.2-9 = Scholastic Dialog ??/Their Reply, His Answer

2) v.2 Question/ Test: Lawful To Divorce Wife?

Politically Loaded Issue, War 6:18

Pharisees Aligned With Herodians, 3:6

2 And Pharisees (or *they* = crowds?) came up Textual Variant, Q & A After Teaching, Grounds - Mt. 19:3  
and in order to *test* him asked, 1:13 (Satan) //3:6, 12:13: Hostile Motive To Expose // Mt. 19:3  
"Is it lawful (permitted) for a man to divorce (dismiss) his wife?" *any cause, Stupid Question //6:18 Herod*  
Taken For Granted Among Jewish Men vs. Mal. 2:16, Ezra 10, Issue Was Grounds

3) vv.3-4 Mosaic Citation Regulating Divorce.

Divorce Not Involve Courts Then

3 He answered them, Jesus Moves From Question To Texts, Forces Language

"What did Moses *command* you?" He Seeks *Command*, They Speak *Allow*, Counter-question  
Jesus Already Knew The Answer, Fishing For Answer To Reject

4 They said, Limit A Problem, Not License A Practice! Not A Command

"Moses *allowed* a man to write a certificate of divorce Legal Damage Control After The Fact  
and put her away." Deut. 24:1-4 Assume/Regulates Divorce, Charges Of Adultery  
Other Texts: Gen. 1, 2; Mal. 2:13-16, Ezra 10 (Conflicted Texts)

4) v.5 Principle Of Concession To Human Sinfulness/ Rebuke.

Authority: Jesus Speaks For God, Interprets Mosaic Allowance//3:5

5 But Jesus said to them, Problem Not The Ideal Or The Law But Us! Willful Disobedience

"For *your* hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. Personal Attack! Dt. 10:16

3:5, 4:10-12, 6:52, Pharisees Allowed Divorce, Essenes Forbade It

3') vv.6-8 Two Mosaic Citations Against Divorce.

Original Intent Sexual Polarity = God's Work, Hard Hearts Are Not The Last Word

6 But from the beginning of creation, Back To Original Intent (1) Higher Ground

Binary Creation Structure Marriage Involves Design, Same-Sex Unions Are Out!

1) 'God made them male and female.' 2 Different Equals, Gen. 1:27, 5:2 [LXX] (2)

Cultural Outworking In Marriage God Not Intend Patriarchy, 3 Steps Of Marriage:

2a) 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, Higher Loyalty (a)

b) and be joined to his wife, Yoked Together, Identify/Join New Home (b)

c) and *the two* shall become one flesh'. Not 3+, A New Thing = Bond/Children? (c)

A New Reality Reunification, Gen. 1:27, 2:24, Mal. 2:13-16, (3)

So they are no longer *two* but one flesh. Organic Reality, Restatement Of Permanent Bond (4)

Indissoluble New Identity, Intended A Permanent Union// CD 4:21, Dt. 24:1-4

2') v.9 Answer: No Divorce For What God Joins.

Jesus Pits God Against Man!

9 What therefore God has joined together, 3<sup>rd</sup> Person Imperative, Summary & Conclusion On Divorce (5)

Solemn Warning let not man put asunder." Warns Of Curse, *Lest ....* Male Not Lord Over Marriage; God Over Two Equals!

Husbands Warned: Yes, It's Technically Lawful; Not God's Intent

1') vv.10-12 Jesus As Teacher: Private Teaching To Disciples.

3:20, 7:17, 9:28, 33 Change Of Venue

10 And *in the house* the disciples asked him again about this matter. Hard Hearts Have Not Yet Been Eliminated, Grave Consequences

11 And he said to them, Jesus' Counter-cultural Teaching Was Hard

"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, In Sinful World The Dream Not Always Realized, Lk. 16:8, Mt. 3:32, 19:9

commits adultery with/against her, Pronouncement Of Case Law, "If... then...", Mt. 5:31-33

12 and if she divorces he husband and marries another, Adultery Was Usually Seen As A Male Property Crime

she commits adultery [i.e. implied: with/against him]. Jewish Setting: Male Privilege, Women As Moral Victims

Nothing About Remarriage Of Rejected Partner

3:28 Speaks Of Forgiveness For *All Sins*

Women Are Fully Culpable Moral Agents

Church Adaptation Of Teaching In New Roman Context// I Cor. 7:10-11

Protects Women From Being Castaways With No Support, Women/Children In Patriarchal Society, ? Of Life Expectancy

## HIGH HOPES AND HARD HEARTS

*“What God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”*

To deface a master work of God invites consequences.  
We have been warned!

M A R K 1 2 : 9

**F**or a glimpse of what’s going on in America, the movies- and especially those about family life- are one place to start. *Stepmom*- a 1998 release starring Julia Roberts and Susan Sarandon, is about the strained relationship between an ex-wife and her children’s new- and younger! step-mom.

In one scene, Luke (played by Ed Harris) brings Anna and Benjamin to a park to sail remote control boats. As father and son launch their craft, Anna- aged 12, looks sad and asks why Isabel moved in. Surprised at her question, Luke fumbles, "Because we love each other. And we want to share our lives together."

"We already had a life together with Mommy," says Anna.

"But Mommy and I weren't getting along very well. And it wasn't fair to you guys, fighting all the time."

Benjamin- age 8- interrupts, "I fight with Anna all the time. Can I move out?"

"No, but you guys are brother and sister."

"You were husband and wife," says Anna, "doesn't that mean something?"

Caught off guard, Luke says slowly, "Yes. It does. But, well, when you get older, your relationships get a lot more complicated. And there's all kinds of feelings flying around. And sometimes, some of those feelings change."

Anna then asks, "But, did you fall out of love with Mommy?"

"Well, yeah, I guess I did. I still love your mom. But it just became a different kind of love, that's all. We're still really good friends, and we always will be."

Benjamin then asks solemnly, "Can you ever fall out of love with your kids?"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Mark 10:1-12.

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**Mark 10:1-12** ..... 4

Notice all the *feeling* language in the scene because that is the dominant theme is our culture’s current understanding of marriage: highly psychologized, sentiment driven, therefore volatile and inherently unstable. It’s all about *my feelings*, falling in and out of love, all about intimacy and the excitement of romance- the release of oxytocin in the brains of women and vasopressin in the brains of men, the so called *love drugs*- and so just about any decision, no matter how hurtful to others, can be justified with an appeal to my emotional states and their immediate validity-which is a big philosophical and moral problem all its own.<sup>2</sup> My brain chemistry has now changed; I’m being mysteriously drawn to another person, and I must do what I want to do since life is centered in my feelings rather than in my commitments and my character and in the consequences for others and in any understanding of what God both offers and requires. To do what I feel makes me authentic. Sound familiar? Somewhere around a million additional children a year lay in bed and wonder, “Can you ever fall out of love with your kids?” And for many, the answer is, “Yes, you can.” Particularly fathers with new wives or girlfriends and a hot new soup of neurotransmitters bathing the synapses of their shrinking brains!

Valentine’s Day is Friday: cards, chocolate, and flowers, maybe a meal out or a night away, a cultural festival of romantic love, a national day of men awkwardly walking drugstore aisles looking for last-minute cards and a gift. The name comes from several early Christian martyrs named Valentinus about whom not much is known but whose feast day was set as February 14. Across the ages, and particularly with Chaucer and the medieval ideal of courtly love, the sacrifice of Christian martyrs was transferred to the noble sacrifice of the lover for the beloved, Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet being a particularly vivid example of this romantic ideal. Legends grew up about the courageous priest Valentinus who, against imperial orders for young men not to marry so as to be better soldiers, performed secret weddings, and for that was arrested and martyred. The story is he healed the jailer’s daughter of blindness and on the night before his execution wrote her a note, signed, “From your Valentine.”<sup>3</sup> So what we have are Christian roots and a present secular reality about the romantic relations of men and women and the energies of attraction built into our deepest structures. Male and female are not surface realities but coded into every cell, a design which- even though marred as everything else by the fall into sin- is still

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<sup>2</sup> See Scott McKnight, *One.Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), Chapter 10, “Sex.Life,” 123-142, for an analysis of the habits and thoughts of young adults.

<sup>3</sup> Summary from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valentine's\\_Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valentine's_Day).

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the imprint of God’s image in the two models of the human person who were designed to join in a binding union with potential for offspring.

Over the last eighteen months a stack of papers has been growing on the corner of my desk reserved for marriage. Big sophisticated sociological reports with titles like *The Pew Research Center’s: The Decline of Marriage And Rise of New Families*<sup>4</sup> or *The Institute for American Values* study *The Marriage Index*,<sup>5</sup> or the one that has gotten the most recent press, *The National Marriage Project’s* study *When Marriage Disappears: The New Middle America*.<sup>6</sup> Another is

The news is not good; trends are not encouraging. Marriage is stable and strengthening among the educated and affluent, but it is fragile and weakening among the poor. No news there; the news is what’s happening in the 58 percent of American that used to compose the middle where marriage is now in steep decline. The new reality is that marriage and marriageability are more linked to education and income than ever before. Marriage quality is down and divorce up in this middle group, as are children born outside marriage. More and more kids grow up in the middle of America without a clue as to what a healthy marriage looks and feels like. The major institution that glues life together in the middle where high school grads scramble for jobs and a future is tattered and torn. The authors sum up the impact soberly:

“For a substantial share of the U.S., economic mobility will be out of reach, their children’s life chances will diminish, and large numbers of young men will live apart from the civilizing influence of married life.... Marriage is in danger of becoming a luxury good attainable only to those with the material and cultural means to grab hold of it.”

In the middle of this vast social change with all sorts of negative outcomes for children and the economy and the national character, there is a great neglect among the people most positioned to make a difference, and that is the church, and- in our case- The United Methodist Church. I do not know of a program we offer at the conference level to strengthen marriages or to encourage local churches to create their

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<sup>4</sup> <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1802/decline-marriage-rise-new-families>.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.americanvalues.org/pdfs/IAV\\_Marriage\\_Index\\_09\\_25\\_09.pdf](http://www.americanvalues.org/pdfs/IAV_Marriage_Index_09_25_09.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.virginia.edu/marriageproject/pdfs/Union\\_11\\_12\\_10.pdf](http://www.virginia.edu/marriageproject/pdfs/Union_11_12_10.pdf).

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own. Other than by performing marriages, and that is under increasing attack by rebel bishops and clergy who want to follow cultural trends and redefine marriage because they think the church has had it wrong all along, we have essentially abandoned the issue of marriage. In a time of crisis we are silent, and we are guilty.

By my read it's time for the church to think and pray and read and strategize about the rebuilding of a *pro-marriage culture* within the church. After all, did not the writer of Hebrews give us a command, "Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled" not just by the married or the hopeful but *by all Christians*, whatever their status. It's time for informed resistance and the reconstruction of a true alternative. The culture doesn't set our vision; God does. The state doesn't set our vision; God does. Marriage is God's idea, and one Jesus repeatedly defended against distortion. I know of few churches that have explicit marriage ministries, which- by the way must include divorce recovery, a remarriage ministry that helps make a good second marriage possible, and also help with new, blended families which on average take seven full years to stabilize.<sup>7</sup> Few clergy get the training to do quality pre and post-marital counseling. Many are themselves divorced and in troubled homes, so it's easy to skip over difficult texts and topics. The unseen pressures of political correctness are absolutely suffocating for many who know just which topics to avoid. So other than performing elaborate ceremonies and participating in an increasingly expensive culture of wedding hype that's all about the dress and the number of pieces of tissue paper in the invitations, when did we in effect take a hands-off approach to this great gift of God, the very first of human institutions God gave us- the home? The silence is deafening. All the focus on the wedding, almost none on the marriage. Makes no sense at all. But it is a telling symptom of our culture's fascination with style over substance. When it comes to what's deep, we really don't know what to do, do we? We've lost our markers and thus our bearings.

"Well, Pastor Phil," someone might reply, "Here's what I think. It started fifty years ago with a series of changes. First the Pill which uncoupled fertility and commitment, followed by the free love of the 60's, the free abortion of the 70's, and the me-ism of the 80's. Mix in large doses of Hollywood and an emphasis on self-fulfillment and entertainment. Add the explosion of porn and the general loss of honor between men and women giving us the current hook-up culture of the colleges

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<sup>7</sup> Ron L. Deal, *The Smart Stepfamily: Seven Steps to a Healthy Family* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2002).

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and universities.<sup>8</sup> Season it all with changes in the divorce laws towards no-fault, then offer it all up to a church that somewhere along the way lost its spiritual and moral nerve in all the flux, and it's nearly overwhelming."

While I may disagree with some of what my imaginary friend has offered, the overall picture is true to life. Something's missing, and that something is a church that no longer assumes marriage is anywhere near healthy and works to preserve it against the waves that are beating against it and wearing it down. Marriage is deeply personal- intimately so, but never merely private. It is a public institution, regulated in both its entry and exit by law; it is public in its effects and most noticeable in its absence. It is an asset to any culture. And who's job is it to watch over this good thing God has given? It is the job of the church, and here we must recover our leadership by modeling and offering something better, something worthy of the aspirations of the young, a noble and good and joyful thing, something blessed by God, "...to love and to cherish until we are parted by death." One of our jobs as the Jesus people is to build the kind of people who can fulfill these vows.

So where do we start? Not with action but with understanding, and for that we examine the teaching of Jesus that marriage is- for most of his followers- the form of life through which their discipleship will be exercised.<sup>9</sup> Some remain single, not always by choice or desire, but most will marry. And, it may surprise you to learn, the United Methodist wedding service is conservative in that it both presumes and teaches that bride and groom are both baptized Christians and that their marriage is understood as their form of service to God.<sup>10</sup> In other words, *it's not all about them* but something larger from the get-go. Our wedding services are not designed for

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<sup>8</sup> On the damage to students- particularly females, see U.C.L.A. psychiatrist Miriam Grossman, M.D., *Unprotected* (New York: Penguin 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Jesus' teaching on marriage, Mark 10:1-12, is located in a larger section of Mark's gospel (8:31-10:32) which is structured into three large sections on discipleship; in other words, marriage is an issue of Christian vocation, of our calling.

<sup>10</sup> The first set of vows, the vows of intention, are explicit, "I ask you, now, in the presence of God and these people, to declare your intention to enter into union with one another through the grace of Jesus Christ, who calls you into union with himself, as acknowledged in your baptism?" Note the priority *on union with Christ* before union with one another (*U.M. Hymnal*: 865). Some allowances are made in *The Book of Worship* (115-116), but these are a pastoral complications and not understood to be the norm. In our church clergy have the right to say Yes or No to marriages.

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secular or mixed marriages between believers and people of other faiths or no faith at all. Best to leave those to secular authorities because the deep wisdom of the church is that a stable home is not built on two different foundations. We must again teach our children to look for spouses who share their faith, and that is hard to do unless the parents are convinced Christians who believe what the church teaches and emphasize it at home. Romance is important; chemistry matters, but it is not enough. Prayer with and for your children about their future. At the beginning of any relationship that might turn serious, the question is: Are we on the same page concerning Jesus Christ and the basics of a life of faith? Marriage is historically a poor form of evangelism. The “I will change him” or “I will change her” strategy is not recommended, and has broken the hearts of many- mainly women.

A variation on this is how many women make the vow not to return to church unless their husband comes with them because they want to project the “we are one” image, so they put their own Christian growth on hold- sometimes for decades- in some sort of misguided attempt to force to God to fix their disinterested spouse. I hear it frequently, and my primary strategy- after an initial dose of pastoral compassion- is to explode such thinking as a lie and a sin. To say to Christ, “I will only follow you if you do this for me first...” is a temptation Jesus rejected in the desert, “You shall not tempt the Lord your God.”<sup>11</sup> God’s hand will not be forced, and if you follow Christ with all that you are in your current circumstances, you may be surprised what happens. Jesus Christ is worthy of my devotion independent of any other consideration. At the end, you will not be asked, “Why didn’t you save your spouse.” You may be asked, “Why didn’t you follow me and trust me?”

So from our current location we return to an brief but intense debate Jesus had with the serious laity of the Pharisees.<sup>12</sup> Because of some recent research by David Instone-Brewer, we now have a much clearer picture of the context in which Jesus worked.<sup>13</sup> It was a Jewish world where divorce was widely practiced, mostly by men.

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<sup>11</sup> Luke 4:12.

<sup>12</sup> Some early manuscripts that say it was the *crowd* and not the Pharisees who posed the question, and- either way- the teaching is not substantially changed, only who it was that raised the issue.

<sup>13</sup> For a summary, see David Instone-Brewer, “What God Has Joined: What does the Bible really teach about divorce,” *Christianity Today*, October 2007; his important book is *Divorce And Remarriage In The Church: Biblical Solutions For Pastoral*

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In the words of James Brown, “It’s a man’s world.” Jewish marriage contracts in that day were clear that a new wife- even if she was a slave- could not be denied the basics by her husband, and those were three: food, clothing, and marital love, as found in Exodus 21:10-11:

“If he takes another wife to himself- even a slave- he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights. And if he does not do these things for her, she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money (i.e. the loss of dowry).”

In other words, a Jewish woman might seek divorce for functional abandonment. On adultery, the issue was more complex. Any unfaithfulness on her part was serious, but serious for him only if the other woman was married; if single, it didn’t count, which is a double standard. Marriage was given by God with the intention of fidelity; God hates divorce and its pain said the prophet Malachi,<sup>14</sup> but God loves people so arrangements were made that the woman at least got a document that permitted her to remarry and prevented her husband from coming back should she remarry and be dismissed a second time.<sup>15</sup> The idea was to give women legal standing and prevent them from being traded among men one after the other, so it was a move in the right direction and set a long trajectory towards justice in this area. Whatever breaks the marriage contract was grounds for divorce, primarily adultery, emotional or physical neglect, or abuse.

This was the situation until a few decades before Jesus came along. God’s vision was the ideal. Divorce was widely available, and there is no evidence- on my reading- to think Jesus was opposed to divorce on legitimate grounds, sad as it was. It was one more symptom of a broken world, a world out of sync with the one who made it. What he was utterly opposed to, and the issue that our text deals with, is a new and popular kind of divorce that had been in effect for only several decades before he came along, a new arrangement that allowed Jewish husbands to dismiss their wives *for any cause*- basically *without cause*, even trivial ones like burning the toast or finding another woman more attractive. And it rested on a disputed reading of a single phrase in Deuteronomy 24:1, which reads, “When a man takes a wife and

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*Realities* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> 2:13-16.

<sup>15</sup> Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

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marries her, if she then finds no favor in his eyes because he has found *some indecency in her* (literally in Hebrew *a thing of nakedness*, and clearly a reference to immorality) and he writes her a bill of divorce....”

Some of the rabbis, led by one Shammai, stuck to the clear meaning- *a thing of nakedness* or adultery as legitimate grounds. Let’s call them the conservatives because they valued precedent. But other rabbis, led by one Hillel, and let’s called them the innovators, said “Aha! A new meaning! Why did Moses use two phrases, *a thing* and *of nakedness*, when only one was necessary? Is he not actually giving us two reasons for a wife’s dismissal, one that we have never before considered till our new reading came along? *Infidelity* but also *a thing*, which we take to mean *nearly anything at all*. A new loophole was found and quickly exploited.

Now because this new reading played into the deep pattern of existing male privilege, and since it was a carefully argued ruling by an acknowledged expert, it spread quickly because- on my reading- it appeals to worst in men, not the best, and I will tell you that appealing to the worst in men is extremely easy to do! Something cold to drink and something forbidden to look at quickly melts the character of many who have not the internal structure to match outside temptations.<sup>16</sup>

Such rabbis as Hillel were not only the interpreters but the administrators of such laws- like current Muslim imams issuing rulings or fatwas, so a new reading of the Bible quickly led to a new social practice under the heading of, “If we can find it in the Bible, we can do it for our advantage.” There was no independent judiciary; no laws needed to be passed, just a rabbinic ruling. Men trading in women without regard for their persons or their welfare, whether in the overly wicked forms of prostitution or porn, or in the perhaps less overt forms of polygamy or serial monogamy are nothing but wrong, and to find creative readings of Scripture to justify such a practice is just plain wicked because it twists the Scripture to undermine the beautiful design of God for marriage. So if you want to toss a wife away, Rabbi Hillel is your man- go to his man-friendly synagogue and sit at his feet, and so it was for several decades before Jesus came along. It was a low point in Jewish marriage practice. Is it any wonder people keep looking for more and different and easier grounds with less consequences on which to sever a sacred covenant? It’s one of the primary symptoms of rebellion against God, and it ignores the real issue which is bad character.

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<sup>16</sup> See the downward spiral of James 1:13-15.

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**Mark 10:1-12** ..... **11**

Men who use and toss women are wicked; women who use and toss men are no better, and Jesus was utterly against practices which trivialize the deepest and most tender commitments of which we are capable, capacities for physical love and deep bonding, child-bearing and child-rearing that are rightly enfolded and protected within the covenant of Christian marriage. As a virginal single man, Jesus was pro-marriage this side of the kingdom- after which marriage as a first creation structure would be no more;<sup>17</sup> Jesus did not argue with divorce for valid reasons, though he also did not require it because of the healing power of forgiveness he expected of his disciples; but Jesus was against any system of clever Bible reading that made it easier deface the creation gift of God in one uncommitted relationship after another.

This is the context that lies behind the question put to Jesus. And if you don't have the proper background, you misread the text, which sadly the church has done across much of its history by labeling all second marriages as adulterous, which they are clearly not.<sup>18</sup> It was perfectly lawful in that day for a man- and to a lesser extent a woman- to divorce for cause, then remarry. Everyone knew that, so the question of verse 2 - at least on the surface- makes no sense, "... and in order to test him asked, 'Is it lawful- or permitted- for a man to divorce his wife?'" Of course it's lawful on legitimate grounds as Deuteronomy 24 and Exodus 10 both teach. But if the question- as heard in that context- means, "Is it permitted for a man to divorce his wife *for any and every reason as we have done for several decades now?*" then the discussion is much more interesting.

Remember, their motive was hostile; it was not mere curiosity but in order *to test him*, to embarrass him and put him in danger. "Take sides, Jesus. Enter the current debate. And if you take the wrong side, then you too will be caught criticizing the marriage practices of our ruler Herod Antipas, to whom your cousin John just lost his head because he criticized his unlawful marriage to his brother Phillips wife?"<sup>19</sup> It was a loaded question on several fronts and offered high public drama. Jesus was now standing in Perea, Herod's territory!

Like any good rabbi, Jesus responded to their question with one of his own,

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<sup>17</sup> Mark 12:25.

<sup>18</sup> On the history, see Michael Gorman, "Divorce and Remarriage from Augustine to Zwingli," at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/augustweb-only/46.0c.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Luke 3:19.

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**Mark 10:1-12** ..... 12

verse 3: “What did Moses command you?” so his move is from rabbinic rulings to Scripture itself, which is a shift of grounds for the debate, and a clever move. And their answer is highly revealing because of the text they choose and the word they used, verse 4: “They said, ‘Moses *allowed* a man to write a certificate of divorce and put her away.’” And right they were. Moses did not command divorce, but it was early on *allowed* as a concession, the motive for which Jesus quickly revealed, “For your *hardness of heart* he wrote you this commandment.” In a fallen world of hard hearts and hard heads and hard realities, God allowed for divorce in a sinful culture of male privilege but bent it slightly in the direction of a new right for women. At least they get a legal document which allows them to remarry and not live in legal limbo. It would take fallen culture a much longer haul to get anywhere near parity and equality before the courts and the courts of public opinion; some say we are not there yet.

But what comes next is what’s important. Jesus does not stop with his insight on why God allowed the concession of divorce because of the sin of hard hearts. His interest is not in the technical legalities of divorce management. Jesus is interested in the kingdom agenda of announcing God’s restorative intent for all creation, part of which is the honorable and loving relationship of men and women this side of the kingdom’s arrival, which is precisely why Jesus leapt over the long history of sin and hard hearts and landed us back in the paradise of Eden with a single phrase, “But from the beginning of creation....”

And just what did the Lord do in the *at the beginning of creation*? Well, God made one humanity in two models. Differentiated sexuality and gender complementary are God’s idea and imprinted into our flesh at the both the macro level of appearance and the micro level of genetics, imprinted by God on the deep hardware of the human person as a matter of structure. Not a choice, but a given. As Jesus noted, “God made them male and female,” a quote from Genesis 1:27. Two different equals, both necessary for fruitfulness, and not a word about patriarchy- which only inserted itself after the fall as recorded in Genesis 3. Jesus then goes on in the second part of verse 6 to display how this creation gift of male and female works itself out in the dynamic of family relationships.

First, the new bond pulls you away from home, “For this cause- meaning the attractive powers of maleness and femaleness- a man shall leave his father and mother.” So I sometimes ask, Are you ready to leave home, emotionally and financially, or are you still connected by an umbilical cord and on the family payroll? Hard question, but the answer is highly revealing. It is sad how many well-meaning

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parents undermine the early years of a marriage by not letting the new couple live with some hard and lean times. When they marry, sell their bedroom furniture!

“For this reason a man shall *leave his father and mother*- and a woman her mother and father, and be joined to his wife- and she to her husband, and the two shall become one flesh,” which is a delightful play on words because it is the renewal of marriage in a sexual union that is the possibility of them becoming *one flesh* in a different way through a child, of which we are reminded every time someone says, “Why, they look just like you.”

Marriage is a new and higher loyalty which displaces the earlier loyalty to parents but also leaves room to honor them. It is celebrated in a physical union which forms a deep bond of intimacy between the two, “and be *joined* to his wife,” which I why I am against the current trend of maintaining separate finances and continuing the same patterns of friendship you had when you were single. You are not single; you are joined; you are married and need to build capital in each other. Merge your finances as the wedding vows require, “... and with all that I am *and all that I have*, I honor you.....” A weekly night out with the girls and a weekly night out with guys may not be such a good thing, especially early on. When I sense that a couple finds more life and joy with friends than each other, it’s a danger signal they’re avoiding one another. Can you have friends? Of course, but remember: you are not singles who happen to be married; you are a married couple who still have friends.

Let me pause and make an appeal here. Studies differ, but a recent one found that adolescent girls, if sexually active between ages fourteen and nineteen, will - on average, have seven sexual partners in a life, and of boys closer to ten.<sup>20</sup> This means a cycle of bond-and-separate, bond-and-separate who knows how many times. And if we remember that to separate here is to *rip-and-tear* because the sexual bond is God’s biological and emotional super-glue, and if we remember that- biblically speaking- to give yourself to someone in an ultimate fashion is the tender personal core of marriage- the *becoming one flesh* part- then what we have at an emotional level is marriage-and-divorce and marriage-and-divorce every time they change partners. Every union is what was possibly a marriage, and the emotional and souls costs are much the same as it if had been. You that are wise and reflective already know this. So when they come all excited about a first legal and blessed marriage, the deep truth of their lives is far different; they’ve been married many times before,

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<sup>20</sup> McKnight, *One.Life*, 125.

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which is why the church wisely sneaks in an oft-ignored phrase in the initial vows of intent, which is, "... and *forsaking all others*, be faithful; to him- or her- as long as you both shall live," all the while knowing that an appetite for variety is not necessarily cancelled by such vows. Fornicators before marriage are at increased risk for adultery after marriage precisely because they lack a strong capacity for self-control. And unless each party goes before God with a repentant heart for their repeated fornications and asks for those emotional bonds to be broken by the power of the Spirit, they will be haunted by such memories all their days because so many pieces of their hearts were scattered abroad and left behind with old lovers whose videos they can recall at will. But repentance and forgiveness are the doorway to secondary virginity for the unmarried; they are a path of hope for the about-to-be-married, and for those already married and struggling with divided hearts, it can be a doorway to renewal. Ask God to give back the pieces of your heart you gave away and never got back.

Jesus knows how precious and fragile this bond is; after all, with the Father and the Spirit the Son designed it in all its tenderness and strength! Which is why he stated so clearly that it deserved ultimate protection and issued a warning that God's wrath would be on any and all who treat it lightly, verse 9: "What therefore God has joined and super-glued together, let not anyone put asunder and minimize or compromise and undermine in any way." Don't deface the Master's work.

Marriage is to be honored as a God-given institution and protected by the state and the church and personally by every Christian- whether you are married or not. "Let marriage be held in honor *by all*, and let the marriage bed be undefiled," wrote the author of Hebrews. "because God will judge the immoral and adulterous."<sup>21</sup> Even if you are not married, and even if you never do, you have a stake in the marriages of others. So honor it. And so every church I am sad to say- including this one, has people who are living under such a judgment because they have comprised their own bond or undermined that of another and have never repented, and until they do, the weight of God's active resistance is on the whole of their lives, and they wonder what's wrong- why a dark cloud is over their every effort.

Friends, a wedding license and a church blessing are not trivial things, not just a piece of paper and a few prayers. They are appropriate cultural supports and protections for the wonderful work of God known as marriage, and when we trivialize

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<sup>21</sup> 13:4.

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or ignore or redesign what God has done, it is we and our culture that suffer, and we are suffering now. When I read the sociological studies, my heart hurts, first because I know how good my life is in comparison, and secondly because I can put names and faces on the casualties. Jesus was not interested in arguing about grounds for divorce, about how to help hard-hearted people trash other people- though he was concerned about justice and equality before God; his concern was that the brilliant design of male and female and their capacity for an enduring joyful union not be lost in the world he came to save. And he gave it to his church, in every age and place, to work for just laws, but more than that to lift up God's original and from-the-beginning dream for marriage so that it would stay bright and available even in a broken and sinful and immoral world like ours. It is still by God's grace a good and grand possibility that needs to be lifted up before the young and preserved among the not-so-young. It is a painful but also a poignant and beautiful thing to see a new widow or widower stand beside an open grave and in their hearts to know that they- with God's help- have kept the promise "to love and to cherish *until we are parted* by death." Painful but good because it points us beyond the limits of this life and tugs us to the life beyond that will eventually become the new heavens and earth of God's forever kingdom.

The Christian gospel is about the whole of life; it's much bigger than marriage and our current malaise, but it is not less, and what I am calling for and will work for- along with all my other dreams- is the recovery of a pro-marriage culture, beginning in the church. Is any one interested in helping me? We must begin to push back against the corrosion of the culture and- at a minimum- to preserve a robust culture of marriage within the church, so that when and if the world grows weary of its follies, there remains a place and a people where the treasures have been preserved and are on display. When I deal with these issues based on Scripture, I feel as if my heart is about to burst, so dear are they to me, so I am happy to report that my Valentine is my girlfriend is my wife!

So what about the tough verses on adultery at the end of our passage? They can't be ignored. Are all divorces and remarriages adulterous? Some Christian traditions have read it this way and developed extensive canon law and marriage tribunals to determine who may and who may not receive the sacraments or remarry in the church. To the extent this shows seriousness about marriage in a throw-away world, it's a good thing. But I think it fundamentally misreads the text. Jesus was speaking against a relatively recent form of loose divorce law that allowed Jewish men to dismiss wife after wife for trivial reasons, actually *for any reason*, which means- on his reading- that the divorces were not valid. And if the divorces were not

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**Mark 10:1-12 ..... 16**

valid because the reasons were not biblical, then remarriage was indeed adulterous since the first was never severed. It's bigamous, and brought these religious scoundrels quickly back under the sanction of the Ten Commandments.

The point is that casual serial monogamy, whether in its married or its currently popular cohabiting form, is not pleasing to God and piles up a fearsome mountain of internal and external judgment, as seen in people who are always thinking the next one will make them happy and who seem constitutionally unable to settle into the commitment that is marriage. Seeking and never finding; that is their fate, because the problem is not the last one you left; the problem is within. Our loving and holy God is utterly and unalterably opposed to such, because it treats as disposable something that was designed as precious and highly valuable, which are the hearts and futures and bodies and children of the men and women his only Son came to save.

So when you buy that card or gift and when you dare to look at that man or woman and say the only three words that work on such occasions, "I love you," recognize that you hold your very life in your hands. Such is the awe-filled knowledge of this God.

