

Marriage & Divorce

Introduction

This is one of those sermons that for me has been a difficult sermon to prepare. Not only because I come from a family that my parents had divorced a few times, but I know how many of you have been through divorces and this is something that hits home.

God's words on these matters may be painful, but they are true, rewarding and protective in its intent.

*Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.
Psalm 19:11 (ESV)*

It is my job to simply herald, preach and teach what our Lord God has to say, even on difficult matters in life.

But know that I do feel the pain with you, brothers and sisters in Christ.

The strength of a healthy society lies in the strength of its marriages.

Destroy the marriage and you destroy society.

For it is in the boundaries of a Godly marriage that a godly offspring is grown.

Sadly, the reality of the divorce rate in South Africa reveals marriages in crisis.

In South Africa. 2017- 25390 divorces happened

- 44,5% Black African population
- 23,8 % white
- 17,8% coloured
- 5,5% Asian

More wives than husbands initiate divorce. 4/10 marriages end in divorce before 10th anniversary.

The top 10 Reasons for Divorce:

- 10.difference in priorities
- 9.religious differences
- 8.Parental responsibilities
- 7.Finances
- 6.sexual incompatibility
- 5.addictions
- 4.social networks, flirting on the internet
- 3.Marriage infidelity, adultery
- 2.Physical abuse
- 1.Lack of communication

Some website's list "do it yourself divorces (DIY)" for the mere price of R890 and R150 rand for the sheriff.

There is a total disrespect for the sanctity of marriage, a total ignoring of God's original design for marriage.

And a solid marriage is grounded upon God's original design for marriage

What does God's have to say on this matter.

Historical Background

Jesus had been preparing His disciples for his own death and resurrection and was teaching them discipleship they needed as they would makes disciples of the nations.

These lessons included teaching on:

- The gospel
- Cost of being a disciple
- The importance of faith
- The importance of humility
- Radical discipleship:
 - Not causing others to sin
 - Eradicating whatever causes you to sin
 - Total dedication
 - The influence of a disciple

And as Jesus moved to towards Jerusalem, he taught a lesson on Marriage and divorce.

Marriage is a witness of Christ relationship to the church.

The marriages of Disciples of Christ have to be a witness of God's character, and Christ relationship to His body to the world.

Just as creation declares the glory of God, so should marriages.

Marks readers facing severe persecution would have had severe pressure upon their marriages.

Was divorce an easy option?

Tradition teaches us that Peters wife was crucified first and then he was crucified head downwards.

Apparently, he had comforted her with the simple words "Remember the Lord."

They set an example of staying together until death do us part.

Reading

Mark 10:1-12

Proposition

6 Perspectives on Marriage and Divorce That Encourage Marriage Faithfulness:

1. Question about divorce - vv1-2
2. Law about divorce -vv3-4
3. Reason for divorce - vv5
4. God's purpose for marriage - vv6-8
5. God's command about marriage - vv9
6. God's' perspective on divorce and remarriage - vv10-12

1. The Question About Divorce – vv1-2

And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them. 2 And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" Mark 10:1–2 (ESV)

And he left there.

There refers to Capernaum, the house of Peter where Jesus had been teaching some of the important lessons on discipleship.

Jesus left the area of Galilee and was traveling slowly towards Jerusalem where He would be crucified.

He had now completed his ministry in the Galilee area.

and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan,

Jesus came to southern Palestine, possibly south across the mountains of Samaria into Judea and Perea, the area of Herod Antipas.

This is where John the Baptist had:

- conducted His ministry.
- Had been imprisoned because John had rebuked Herod Antipas for his marriage contrary to Mosaic law and was later martyred for that.
- It's also the area He had confronted the Pharisees and called them a brood of vipers Matthew 3:7-10

and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them.

Jesus resumes some public ministry in open air situation.

² And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" Mark 10:1-2 (ESV)

Some Pharisees asked whether a man may divorce his wife.

Divorce means to lose or let loose, to dissolve a marriage relationship, to unbound, to dismiss.

It means severing the covenant or contractual agreement that existed.

It's a cutting off and separation of the parties.

Now the Jewish scholars were not debating whether a man may divorce a wife, but rather what the grounds were for divorce.

Divorce and remarriage was permitted according to Deuteronomy 24:1-4

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds 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 of his house, and she departs out of his house, Deuteronomy 24:1 (ESV)

The big question was interpreting the term **indecency** in Deuteronomy 24:1 as the basis for divorce.

The followers of **Shammai** answered that question with adultery and a failure to observe the Jewish law.

The followers of **Hillel** argued that in addition any moral fault, anything causing an annoyance, embarrassment to a husband, burning the supper, allowing someone to see her ankles, letting her hair down, making a negative comment about her mother-in-law, finding some else the husband preferred were legitimate ground for a divorce.

Basically, they could get divorced for any matter.

But they were not asking about the grounds for divorce, but rather whether a man may divorce a woman.

It suggests ulterior motives, and the text gives us their motive.

They asked so as to test him, Greek term means to entrap Him.

The Pharisees were seeking to entrap Jesus as an intolerant hardliner, who identified the people and their leaders as adulterers and adulteresses.

They knew Jesus views was radical, and talking about this matter could cause a charge in which he was seen to contradict the Mosaic law.

An unwise answer on divorce could be seen as a political assault or judgment upon Antipas and His wife.

Jesus was being asked a question that would shed light on whether Antipas was justified in divorcing the daughter of King Aretas to marry Herodias.

Political entrapment may have played a role.

Fundamentally, they suspected He held views different to what they held and wanted Him to compromise the authority of the Torah provide grounds to arrest Christ.

Pharisees had a very liberal view on the basis for Divorce, and they intended to keep it so.

Principle: People have a very low view of the reasons for divorce.

Application

Being divorced without even a reason is common.

1. You and I know how easy it is to get a divorce these days.
2. The statistics reveal the situation.
3. Just because it may be easy to get a divorce, does not mean that it is God's will.
4. Just because many divorce or may even encourage you to divorce, you and I should seek God's council about marriage and divorce.

2. The Law About Divorce - vv3-4

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." Mark 10:3-4 (ESV)

3 He answered them, "What did Moses command you?"

Jesus appeals directly to the law.

They provide a basic summary of Deuteronomy 24:1-4

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds 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 of his house, and she departs out of his house, 2 and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 and the latter man hates 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 man dies, who took her to be his wife, 4 then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (ESV)

*⁴ They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away."
Mark 10:3-4 (ESV)*

About the Jewish law stated that:

- Only Men could initiate a divorce, there was no allowance for a woman to divorce her husband.
- It allowed for divorce but did not determine whether it was right or wrong.
- Its primary purpose was to provide a degree of protection for the women who had been sent away by their husbands.

The **certificate** of divorce

- It was the legal notice protecting women from brutal abandonment.
- It gave her permission to be released from her marriage contract and **affirms her right to remarry.**

In an ancient divorce bill uncovered it included this statement "so as to be free at they own disposal to marry another" (Adams)

- It protected her rights and ensured her husband could not claim her dowry
- It regulated the reality of divorce without condoning or condemning it.
- It prevented the previous husband from destroying her new marriage and from trying to reclaim her.
- It freed her from the accusation of adultery which carried a death sentence.
- It prevented wife swapping
- It was intended to deter the upheaval that came from a divorce

Jesus's question was:

"What did Moses command you?"

So, they answered from the legal material of the books of Moses.

They went to a text of concession (Compromise, allowance) not a text of intension.

Deuteronomy 24 spoke of the situation after a divorce had taken place, the wife had remarried and divorced, and the husband had died.

Then the former husband could not remarry her for that is an abomination in God's eyes

The text regulates the situation **after** a divorce has taken place, the **results** of a divorce.

The divorce is pre-supposed; it was not a text giving permission for a divorce rather regulating its effects.

They (Pharisees) went to a passage:

- that relates to events after fall.
- That governed the results of a divorce.
- They came to the law asking what does it allow me to do, what can I get away with.
- They were interested in their rights not their responsibilities.
- They wanted to justify their own sinful behaviour no matter what the consequences.
- They asked questions on the rights of the husband but paid no attention to the rights of the wife.

Principle

- People tend to focus on what they can get away with

Application

Do you have a consumer mindset with regard to marriage? If it does not work, I will use it and discard it?

Are you simply a modern polygamist that does not marry many women at the same time, but many consecutively?

If my wife does not, please me, will I simply get another wife or partner?

Don't be like the Pharisees, don't be like the world.

The Bible allows/permits for three situations for divorce and by implication remarriage:

1. Death of a spouse (1 Corinthians 7:39-40, Romans 7:2-3)
2. Adultery (Matthew 19:9, 5:32)
3. Abandonment (1 Corinthians 7:15)

Even though the Scriptures permit it, these are commands that are protective in nature for the innocent person in the divorce.

It does not mean that God is condoning divorce. ESV does not translate the Hebrews well, but the NASB does.

Malachi 2:16 (NASB95)

¹⁶ *"For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, ...*

God hates divorce. `

Jesus seeks to recover God's will and original intension for marriage.

So, he moved towards the reason for this law written in Deuteronomy 24 vs 5,

The reason for divorce and spoke of God's original intension with regard to marriage. Vs 6-8

3. The Reason for Divorce - vv5

And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. Mark 10:5 (ESV)

Jesus confronts their wicked hearts.

He provides the original reason why Moses gave these commandments governing the results of a divorce. It was due to the hardness of their hearts.

The term means stubbornness, obstinacy. It indicates man's heart attitude towards God. It's the spiritual condition of persistently being unresponsive to God and His word. Jesus is providing the motive for the commandment but inherently the motive why people divorce.

After the fall in Genesis 3, things changed.

- Guilt, fear, and disobedience became a reality.

- In marriage there was blame shifting, role reversals and autocratic headship.
(Genesis 3:16)

Deuteronomy 24 :1-4 was in reality a witness to the evil which arose in disregard for God's original creative purposes.

The reason for divorce came from the sin nature that affected the heart, making it unresponsive to God, stubborn and rebellious. Stubborn rebelliousness against God's original commandments gave rise to a heart condition called hard heartedness, a callous attitude. Every marriage would be a lifetime marriage, perfect, harmonious and would reflect God had it not been for the fall that affected the human heart.

Before the fall, the divorce rate was 0%.

It is due to our heart conditions affected by the fall that there are divorces. It's due to your heart condition that God gave laws to reveal the sinfulness of your heart.

Your heart comprises your thoughts, your affections, your beliefs, your will, your inner person. A rebellious heart towards God, affects your actions, affects marriages, and produces divorce and all its devastation. Every sin comes from the heart.

Application

1. Know that divorce is simply an action, but the root cause is a heart problem.
2. Know that there is hope for those who have gone through a divorce.
3. Divorce is a sin, but there is forgiveness at the cross even for such a sin.
4. It is only when you repent and trust Christ as Savior and Lord that your heart can be changed, so if you have not done that May I encourage you to do so.
5. Divorce is what happens to you, but it does not determine your identity.

Even God uses the imagery of divorce to refer to what happened to Him in his relationship to Israel.

She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. Jeremiah 3:8 (ESV)

This does not change the identity of God.

4. Gods Purpose for Marriage - vv6-8

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. Mark 10:6–8 (ESV)

6 But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’

In the parallel passage Jesus preceded this statement with

⁴ ... *“Have you not read that ... Matthew 19:4 (ESV)*

Jesus in essence was saying, that despite their expertise on Moses law, they were ignorant of God's design.

God's original design for marriage was:

- A union between one man and one woman.

Not:

- A man with a man, or a woman with a woman
- A man with many women or women with many men

*‘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.
Mark 10:6–8 (ESV)*

The man would leave behind his father and mother son relationship and enter into a new relationship with his wife.

The term hold fast means to glue one thing to another. Being closely and faithfully devoted to another. A leaving from the parents, a cleaving to your wife. This was to be a permanent strong union.

Hebrew term *hold-fast* in Genesis 2:24 means to stick together, like the parts of a body, to join to, to fasten your grip. So strong is this union that they become one flesh. They are no longer two but one.

God originally made mankind male and female and then instructed them to multiply and fill the earth. God wants many people to reflect his character, and it happens through a godly offspring. This can only happen through the bond of marriage.

Marriage reflects God's image (unity and plurality in the Godhead, equality yet distinct roles as well as Christ's relationship to the church)

Our passages imply a few things:

- Man, and women were created equal in God's eyes.
- The husband's obligations to his wife surpasses his allegiance to his parents.
- Marriage is a sacred union and results in a new creation: one flesh union, no longer two.

Jewish divorce policy made the man the lord of the marital relationship instead of God who is the Lord of marriage. Jewish divorce policy did not give equal rights with divorce as a woman was not allowed to initiate it. The point Jesus is making is that in God's original design it was to be a lifetime, permanent union reflecting the image of God, an unbreakable union, a one flesh union.

Application

- Your marriage is a witness to the trinity, the unity, the equality yet distinct roles in the trinity.
- Your marriage should be a witness of Christ's relationship to the church, and unbreakable relationship with His body.
- God's original intention for marriage is until death do us part.
- Think about this: If a marriage reflects Christ's faithful permanent relationship with His church, what does a divorce reflect? Christ divorcing His church...do you see how that affects your witness.
- Sadly, even God's was not shown honour by Israel's unfaithfulness towards Him. (Jeremiah 3:8)

5. God's Command About Marriage - vv9

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

Mark 10:9 (ESV)

Jesus grounds the sanctity/ holiness / the sacredness of marriage in the authority of God. What God has joined (Yoked/paired together)- the man and the women in marriage.

God commands: *Let no man separate.*

Grammar indicates it to be an ongoing command.

The decisive **no** to divorce provides the safeguard against human sinfulness and selfishness which threatens to destroy marriage.

God's original plan for marriage is that God is Lord over marriage. A lifetime of being married. What He has joined No man may separate. (It's a command) God has ordained marriage, and it should not be broken by man. God's view on marriage did not support the Jewish view that divorce was permissible for any reason.

It was due to the curse, due to the fall that perfect harmony was shattered, wives desired to be independent of their husband's authority and impose their will on their husbands and husbands' revolt against their authority in harsh and autocratic ways. Hard hearts, selfish desires lead to great conflicts and ultimately to divorce.

Application

Before getting married, be sure that this person is a believer. Make sure you know and understand the biblical roles required for marriage. Read books like preparing for marriage (Dr Mack) or *Sweethearts for A Lifetime* which provides the Biblical blueprint for a solid marriage. You want to enter such a marriage for a lifetime.

Do not enter the marriage thinking that if it does not work, you will simply get a divorce. Those of you who have been divorced.

Know that it happened due to the effects of the fall and hardened hearts. Even if you were not the ultimate cause for the marriage to fall apart, you know that you can and may have sinned in your heart and actions in your response to how the other person sinned against you.

You did have a part to play in the divorce even if it was a minor part.

- You may not have studied God's word and understood all God commands about marriage.
- You may not have prepared properly for the marriage:
- You may not have fully known the person you married, and you should have.
- Was he or she a believer, and was there clear fruit of that in their lives?

These are harsh words, I know, but having failed, there is hope, there is forgiveness at the feet of the cross. You still live with the consequences of divorce, but you can find hope, joy, peace in life,

And ultimately after death, there awaits a perfect marriage in heaven, being the bride of the Lamb of God.

6. God's' Perspective on Divorce and Remarriage – vv10-2

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."

Mark 10:10–12 (ESV)

¹⁰ And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter.

The disciples once again seek to question Christ in the privacy of the home. His statements were unexpected and had far reaching implications. They needed clarity.

Jesus's reply consists of two balancing statements.

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."

Mark 10:10–12 (ESV)

1. Concerning a man who divorces his wife and remarries another.
2. Concerning a woman who divorces her husband and remarries another.

The basic premise is that divorce followed by remarriage results in them committing adultery. The sin of adultery occurs when remarriage occurs rather than the result of divorce. Jewish divorce included the allowance for remarriage.

The Certificate stated: 'You are free to marry any man.' Jesus statements assume that remarriage follows divorce.

The basis for this statement in vs 11 & 12 was that the original one flesh union was inseparable and that divorce did not change that reality.

Divorce and remarriage were an offence against God's original purpose for marriage and against the partner that was wronged. In the Jewish world a man could commit adultery against the **husband** of the women, but the idea that it was against the women was remarkable. Jesus was emphasizing the equality of the sexes.

Women did not have the right to initiate divorce in Jewish culture only in Roman culture. Herodias was the exception and provoked the execution of John who condemned that action. For Jesus there was no difference.

Whoever initiates the divorce and remarries, the result is adultery. Jewish law stated that remarriage was valid only if the divorce was valid. If the divorce is invalid, then the individual is still married and becomes an adulterer. But the Pharisees had broadened the basis or grounds for divorce for any reason. Jesus confronted this thinking head-on.

Jesus's focus was not on the exceptions but laying strong foundations for the permanent nature of the marriage ties in a context where marriages were being dissolved at any time for any reason.

Mark emphasized God's original design, not the exceptions/ grounds for divorce because he was confronting the common and pervasive-ness of divorce, pursuing divorce for any reason.

Mark's readers may also have struggled with this mindset concerning marriage and divorce as persecution would have put great pressure on marriages.

Mathew however included the exception in the parallel passage.

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

Matthew 19:9 (ESV)

He had repeated Jesus's teaching on the sermon on the Matthew 5:32. The disciple's shocked reaction is mentioned in vs 10.

The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”

Matthew 19:10 (ESV)

They correctly understood the binding nature of marriage and that Jesus set a very high standard, permitting divorce in only extreme circumstances.

Divorce was not God's original purpose or design for marriage before the fall. The fall, the resulting hardness of heart required laws to address the devastation that happened as the result of divorce and remarriage.

Exception mentioned in Matthew 19:9 is **sexual immorality**: “porneia” (which has a variety of meanings means to commit fornication or any sexual sin, unlawful sexual intercourse, prostitution, unchastity, sexual unfaithfulness, sexual acts that were morally objectionable)

The most likely meaning refers to adultery because it refers to the actions between married couples.

But the exception is not the Norm. The norm should be that marriage is a lifetime commitment. Adulterers were supposed to be executed.

- Adultery was punishable by death (Exodus 20:14, Leviticus 20:10)

“If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

Leviticus 20:10 (ESV)

- Premarital sex was also punished (Leviticus 19:10-21) by compensation and a guilt offering.
- Coveting another’s spouse was forbidden (Exodus 20:17, Matthew 5:28)

And so, the innocent party could remarry in principle because the adulterer would have faced capital punishment.

For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. 3 Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.

Romans 7:2–3 (ESV)

John 8:1-11 even though not in the original scriptures do give us an example of a women that had been caught in adultery and would have faced capital punishment.

God however did show mercy in the application of that law. With David committing adultery with Bathsheba, we read.

David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And Nathan said to David, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.

2 Samuel 12:13 (ESV)

God showed Mercy to David.

God did permitted divorce in unusual circumstances.

- Deuteronomy 7:1-3 God forbid Israel to intermarry with pagan people.
- Sadly, in Ezra 9:1-2, 10:1-3 Israel had intermarried with idolatrous people.
- In Ezra 10:5-44 A mass divorce happened.

God hates divorce but hates idolatry even more and divorce was a lesser evil than having Israel lapse into idolatrous false religion. Even though God's Law stands firm, making you and I accountable and guilty. There is mercy and forgiveness at the cross of Christ.

Application

You and I should not focus on the exceptions. You and I should focus on God's original design for marriage and pursue that with all your heart. This is only possible if your heart of stone has become a heart of flesh. If you repent and trust Christ as your Saviour and Lord. He died and rose again.

Then secondly, embrace God's original design for marriage, pursue the oneness, pursue reflecting Christ in your marriage.

May your marriages be a witness to the world of Christ faithfulness to the church and the unity in your marriage reflect the unity in the church and in the trinity.

This is only possible as you embrace your roles in Marriage in Ephesians 5:22-30 and as you walk in yielded-ness to His Spirit and word (Ephesians 5:18, Colossians 3:16)

Conclusion

6 Perspectives on Marriage and Divorce That Encourage Marriage Faithfulness.

1. Question about divorce 1-2 reveals the worlds hatred of Christ and their lax view on marriage and divorce.
2. Law about divorce 3-4 was to govern and protect the fallout from divorce.
3. Reason for divorce 5 was due to the hardness of the heart, the effect of the fall.

4. God's purpose for marriage 6-8 union of a man and a woman, made one flesh by God, to reflect Christ relationship to the church and something of God's character as a triune God.
5. God's command about marriage 9 tells us that God's intention for marriage is for a lifetime.
6. God's perspective on divorce and remarriage in vs 10-12, is that the person who divorce except for immorality (Paul later abandonment and death) and remarries is committing adultery. He emphasizes the seriousness and sanctity of marriage.