

## DIVORCE (Mk. 10:1-12)

**Mk. 10:1** And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judaea by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again. **2** And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. **3** And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? **4** And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. **5** And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. **6** But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. **7** For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; **8** And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. **9** What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. **10** And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. **11** And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. **12** And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.

This is a tremendously difficult subject which unfortunately many of God's people have to face, either personally, or through their families ... It is also a potentially explosive subject because it can engender strong opinions which often cause division among Christians. So we need to approach this subject extremely carefully, but more than anything, we must seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to arrive at the conclusion in tune with the mind of God. ... I do not in any way want to cause hurt, but as we study through the Gospel of Mark I want to simply relate what I understand the Word of God to be teaching.

First and foremost, how does God view divorce? The short answer is found in Mal. 2:16, where He says He hates divorce. That, - plainly and simply, - is God's attitude towards it. Why does He hate it? He hates it because it is in direct contradiction to His creation ordinance, - it goes against what He set out at the beginning, **Gen. 2:24** Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. ... This is the only form of marriage God has ordained, and it is the only form of marriage He recognises, for every other form is invalid and unacceptable to Him. Marriage, as far as God is concerned, is between one man and one woman for as long as life on earth shall last. If that marriage agreement is terminated it is in contravention of His creation ordinance.

That clear creation ordinance was first rejected by Lamech, the grandson of Adam, who introduced *bigamy* (Gen. 4:19), and as the population developed *polygamy* was popularised. Each step away from God's ideal created family problems and inevitably divorce became widespread, even among the children of Israel. This was exacerbated because of the leniency within outside Godless nations.

One of the greatest examples of the decline of marriage was during the period when Malachi prophesied. This was following the return of the Jews to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. Life was gradually returning to

‘normal’. However, once they had resettled in Jerusalem divorce again came to the fore.

Now, Nehemiah lived during the same time as Malachi, and Nehemiah explains how divorce was one of the major components which was damaging the nation, **Neh. 13:23** In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: **24** And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people. ... The Jewish national identity was being severely eroded, because the Jewish men had divorced their Jewish wives and remarried Gentile women. ...

Malachi addressed the priests as to how they were condoning and promoting this behaviour (the implication being that apostasy, - the ‘falling away’, - begins in the pulpits), **Mal. 2:1** And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. **2** If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart. ... **8** But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. **9** Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law. ... **11** Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination [*disgusting thing*] is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned [*defiled, desecrated*] the holiness [*qodesh*] of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange [*foreign*] god. ... They had a *façade* of religion which was unacceptable to God, and He told them, **13** And this have ye done again, covering [*hiding*] the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand. ... You are making a mockery! ... **14** Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously [*i.e. adulterously, unfaithfully*]: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. ... And God told them, **16** For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away ... *divorce*. Divorce is a symptom of rebellion against God and abandonment of His creation ordinance.

Four hundred years after Malachi and Nehemiah, we come to this event described in Mark 10. By this time divorce had become very common within Jewish society, and it no longer had a stigma. However, it had not become acceptable to Jesus for He repeated His Father’s creation ordinance, referring to Gen. 2:24 (Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his

wife: and they shall be one flesh), **Mk. 10:6** But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. **7** For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; **8** And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. ... The indivisible number, they are no more twain, but one flesh. God's mind had not changed ... and this was very straightforward, **9** What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Let's notice where this was happening, **Mk. 10:1** And he [*Jesus*] arose from thence [*from the north of the Sea of Galilee*], and cometh into the coasts of Judaea by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again. Jesus had previously been teaching His disciples (Mk. 8:31-50), and He has departed from Galilee and was heading towards Jerusalem via the eastern side of the Sea. He has come down through the region known as Perea, so as not to travel through Samaria. Along the way, - which would take Him about six months or so, because He would meet many people, preaching to them and teaching them, and also healing, - Lk. 10-18 and John 7-11 records some of His ministry during that time.

Annoyingly, He was being followed by a malicious and malevolent band of Pharisees. They were trying to discredit and destroy His reputation, **Mk. 10:2** And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, *Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him.* ... They were *testing* Him, they were trying to 'catch Him out'. The Pharisees had their minds made up, of course, but they wanted to use the question about divorce to enflame incitement against Jesus for many of the people around Him were divorced and remarried ... How do we know? We know because if it was not an issue, they would not have brought it up! So they asked the very pointed and calculated question, *Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?* ... Jesus, in Your estimation, is divorce right?

The Pharisees knew what they were doing because they had it in their records that Jesus had previously said, **Mt. 5:32** *whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.* ... If you divorce your wife for any other reason apart from her being unfaithful, and if you go and marry someone else *you* commit adultery ... and if she goes and marries someone else *she* also commits adultery.

They wanted to make the teaching of Jesus unfavourable, unpalatable, and repugnant to the people. They wanted to display the *intolerance* of Jesus, as far as they saw it! ... There was also another even more devious angle to it ...

Jesus was in Perea, and Perea was ruled by Herod Antipas ... and he was the one who lusted after his brother's wife, and he eventually took and married her, - after she had divorced her first husband. ... That is the predicament over which John the Baptist was beheaded! So, this was potentially dangerous territory for Jesus too!

But Jesus referred them to Moses, <sup>3</sup> *And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you?* ... Forget what the rabbis and your tradition says, Go right back to the beginning ... What did Moses say?! What does the Word of God say through Moses? ... It does not matter what anyone else says. It does not even matter what the law of the land says but what matters is what the Word of God says! ... He wasn't avoiding their question, but He was making them face up to the Law of God upon which their nation had been founded. ... <sup>4</sup> *And they said [very confidently], Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.*

It was fairly easy, - scribble out a bill of divorcement and send her on her way! *That* is how they dealt with any man who wanted rid of his wife, - they wouldn't even have thought of sitting the couple down, and speaking with them, and encouraging them to repair their marriage ... And Jesus 'touched on a raw nerve', <sup>5</sup> *[He] answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. What did He mean ... the hardness of your heart?!*

The problem was the Pharisees had devised a code and had listened to some of their leading liberal rabbis teaching how divorce was 'alright' ... it was acceptable. Especially in more recent times, this had been popularly propagated by a leading rabbi called Hillel (... in opposition to Rabbi Shammai) who taught the men they could divorce their wives for *any* reason ... literally, *any* reason! ... And in this, they were 'catching up' with the pagan nations.

... But Jesus asked them, *What did Moses command you?* ... What does the Law of God say?! ... **Is. 8:20** *To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.* ... What does the Bible say?! It doesn't matter what anyone else says, it is what the Word of God says His people need to hear. ... Forget what the Pharisees have concocted, and get back to what God teaches, and has always taught.

... And the Pharisees knew Jesus was referring them back to one of the major teachings on this issue, in Deut. 24, **1** When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. **2** And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. **3** And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; **4** Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance. ... They were quite proud of their progressive 'forward-thinking' interpretation of that passage ... They believed that if your wife no longer finds any *favour* in your eyes, you can get rid of her! No matter what it is you can get rid of her by divorcing her!

Read those verses much slower, though, and concentrate on what they are saying ... Do you see a command *anywhere there* for the man to *divorce* his wife? No, you don't. What you see is a man taking a wife, marrying her, finding out something he doesn't like about her, and then he decides to divorce her ... All he has to do is write a certificate of divorce, put it in her hand, and send her out of the house. Then she can go and marry someone else (v. 1,2) ... But, do you see any command there ... *to be divorced?* ... No, you don't because such a commandment would clearly contradict God's Word.

*There is no command to be divorced coming from God through the Law of Moses because it would have been completely contrary to God's creation ordinance!* ... It simply indicates how the Divine ordinance of marriage had become so corrupted in Moses' time, divorce had become acceptable, and written into the Law, and it had sadly become familiar among the children of Israel ... as it had throughout the other pagan and godless nations.

Then, in v.3, her second husband begins to not like her either, and *he* divorces her. The *command* does not come until v.4, *Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife* ... *That* is the command! God commands *that* to be an absolute 'no-no'! She cannot go back to her first husband and remarry him! God forbids it! But, that is the *only* command in these verses ... all the rest is the way man, - the liberal Rabbis and Pharisees, - had devised. And also, there is *not* a command anywhere there to divorce. ... These Pharisees in front of Jesus had made it all up! ... They were following the traditions of rabbis who had abandoned the Law of God.

But what about adultery? ... Surely you can divorce because of adultery? Well, actually, no ... the Law of Moses did not allow it ... but here is what the Law of Moses stipulated had to happen if adultery was committed, **Dt. 20:10** the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, *the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death* ... and that is what the Pharisees in Jn. 8:1-11 were wanting done to the woman caught in adultery. ... Mind you, they had changed that also, because they did not bring the man to be stoned as well, only the woman!

What the Pharisees were teaching was this, - divorce had come to be acceptable among the Jews ... **Dt. 24:1** *When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her* ... All the man had to do was to find something about her he didn't like, - some 'uncleanness' -, and divorce her .... That will do ... 'uncleanness' ... *anything!* ... But Moses, in the Law, - on behalf of God, - did not give *any* grounds for divorce. ... The manmade laws were a human concoction.

... So, with what we now know of how the Law of Moses taught in Dt. 24, let's return to Mk. 10:4 and apply this, *And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.* They actually made it sound as if Moses *allowed*, - permitted, almost encouraged or sanctioned, - divorce, but he didn't ... and Jesus went on to explain to them how it was because of the hardness of their hearts ... σκληροκαρδία ... sclerosis ('hardening') of the heart ... that Moses 'suffered' it, - he hesitantly permitted it! He allowed ('suffered') it because he knew how hard-hearted they were for they were so far from God's ideal, and they were doing it anyway! ... Jesus then brought these Pharisees back to Gen. 2:24, **Mk. 10:6** *But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. <sup>7</sup> For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; <sup>8</sup> And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. <sup>9</sup> What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder* ... and, at this point, there was no further argument with the Pharisees.

So, marriage is an institution of God between one man and one woman, - and no other variation. ... Any other variation is seriously contrary and unacceptable to God's will ... Jesus also reiterated how the man and the woman had to 'cleave' to one another, in a bond which works at allowing nothing to get between the two. It is a relationship the husband and the wife guards faithfully, and in which none other shares, and God's intention is for it

to be unbreakable, <sup>9</sup> What therefore *God* hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Marriage is God's creation decree. Its origins are in His Divine will. And out of the two becoming one, - through marriage, - it is God's order of the family into which children are born, *Gen. 1:27* So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. <sup>28</sup> And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply.

It is not God's will for a couple to live together for marriage is the manner by which that is to be done. And neither is it His will to divorce for that is not what He intended in His creation ordinance. He designed marriage to last ... and as Christians, it is our responsibility to work towards that goal, i.e. to please Him within the confines of the permanent covenant union of marriage.

However ... and we must face up to it ... the Divine ideal was corrupted ... Sin, as a consequence of the Fall, corrupted it. Martin Luther said, "There is no estate to which Satan is more opposed as to marriage" ... How could these religious leaders who were supposed to defend and teach the Law of God ... how could they teach against what God had so obviously set in place from the beginning, and how could they become so comfortable in their error? ...

Well, they *had* become comfortable with it ... and it is a sad sign of society when divorce is so acceptable. I also believe, - as the many records throughout Scripture demonstrate, - it is a sign of God's judgment on a nation ... God's ideal has been abandoned ... so what are we to do? How are to conclude?

Indeed, that is what the disciples were wondering when they asked Jesus for further clarification, *Mk. 10:10* And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. <sup>11</sup> And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. <sup>12</sup> And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery [*cf. Lk. 16:18*]. ... If you divorce your wife and marry someone else, you commit adultery. That is because God hates divorce for it contravenes His creation ordinance.

But, are there not some really impossible situations where God might permit divorce? Is that what I Cor. 7:10-16 might be referring to? Does God leave *any* grounds for an exception? ... Let's turn to Mt. 19, which is the parallel passage. It is very much the same as what Mark recorded (and also Luke) ... let's 'cut in' at Mt. 19:4, And he [*Jesus*] answered and said unto them [*the*

*Pharisees*], Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup> And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? <sup>6</sup> Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. <sup>7</sup> They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? <sup>8</sup> He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. ... It is exactly the same as the Gospel of Mark. Matthew, however, - under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, - includes an additional clause, <sup>9</sup> And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, *except it be for fornication* [πορνεία], and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

That is the exception. If there is any form of sexual sin (πορνεία) which encroaches upon either of the marriage partners, - such as adultery, - divorce is rendered permissible for the terms of the marriage agreement/covenant to be terminated. ... Divorce is not the unpardonable sin ... and it must be considered within the parameters Jesus set out here in Mt. 19:9, *except it be for fornication*. That is not opening the floodgates, but it is the grace of God in the face of man's rebellion against His creation ordinance. ... And it is exactly what Jesus had said previously, **Mt. 5:31** Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: <sup>32</sup> But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away [ἀπολύω, *unloose*] his wife, *saving for the cause of fornication* [πορνεία], causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

Up to this point, - in Mk. 10, - adultery was the only permitted grounds in the Old and New Testaments to justify divorce. Divorce is not God's will, - it never has been for He hates it. Adultery does not have to be the end of a marriage ... as we see with Hosea and his wife Gomer ... which mirrored the relationship between God and Israel, for He waited for her, even though she adulterated herself among the godless nations. In fact, Hosea 3 is a beautiful chapter to conclude our study with, **Hosea 3:1** Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine. <sup>2</sup> So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley: <sup>3</sup> And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee. <sup>4</sup> For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: <sup>5</sup> Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD



their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days. ... God did not cast Israel off, - she was the ‘apple of His eye’ (Zech. 2:8). He had said back in Dt. 7:8 that He chose and loved Israel ... and when God chooses to love you He never removes His love for it is an eternal love, and He does not believe in divorce! Marriage is forever. ... and He does not change His mind.

When you look back to the beginning, God was gracious to Adam when He introduced the wife, - one man and one woman, - **18 And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.** ... That is what God did. God *knew* the man needed a woman ... and the two became one, in His will and plan. I’m grateful to the Lord for having a good marriage that the two of us are one in Him ... and that is the way He intended the marriage union to be, - the man and the woman becoming one in Him. ... Pray for those who are struggling with the marriage relationship. Pray especially for the Christian witness within marriage. The world has corrupted marriage, but God’s will for His people is to uphold ... and hold up ... that most precious of relationships which He ordained from the beginning.

And that is the best way to make a marriage work, and to keep it working well ... to be united together, - man and wife, - in the Lord Jesus Christ. Pearl and I will be married thirty-five years in November, and the Lord is in the centre of our marriage. ... We have to watch our bills like everyone else, and we have to be wise and look after our health and everything else ... but what makes a fulfilling happy marriage is that “Christ is the Head of the house” and in the centre of the home. ... Marriage is the gift of God ... a treasure with which He has blessed every loving couple to keep precious.

The writer to the Hebrews wrote, **Heb. 13:4 Marriage is honourable [precious] in all.** In these present times when it is suffering throughout our society, may we, as God’s people, unashamedly, - on His behalf, - defend this most blessed of Divinely-ordained institutions! Amen.

*[I trust I have not offended or hurt anyone in how I have looked at this passage. It is not my intention. My intention is only to preach the Word of God faithfully as I believe He teaches me. ... And if there is anything you would like to ‘take up’ with me, please feel free to do so, but taking care to avoid any spirit that would disrupt the harmony of believers.]*