

Two shall become One

Mark 10:1-12

Covenant Waterfall, 6 December 2020

Read

Pray

Introduction

There is so much confusion today in the area of sexual ethic. We live in an age of moral relativism, where each of us is encouraged to follow our hearts and live our own truth – do what works for you. In this context, the clear teachings of the Bible in this area are seen as hopelessly outdated and downright oppressive!

The guiding principle today when it comes to relationships is if it feels right, it must be right. If you have feelings for someone, if they make you feel happy, not hurting anyone else, then surely it's fine? Marriage is just a cultural institution, so there's no problem with living together outside of marriage, if you really love one another? And what can be so bad with two men or two women who really love each other? Surely love is the guiding principle and those who truly love each other, consenting adults, should be free to pursue their love? And when people decide to end the relationship – feel incompatible, don't feel in love any more, then surely we can walk away from a marriage? Guiding truth through all this are our feelings.

Result? Lots of confusion and relational brokenness today. Divorce happens frequently. Surely there is a better way for us to live, something more sure than our feelings and emotions?

What we see in this evening's passage is Jesus showing us a very different way. We see something that's beyond our own feelings as a basis for relationships. Instead what Jesus points us to is relationships that are rooted in how God has designed and created us to be.

What we'll see is that marriage is God's idea and is designed as a life-long union between husband and wife. And that this is his will, which results in blessing and flourishing.

- One flesh, vv.1-9
- Divorce and Adultery, vv.10-12
- Our faithful Bridegroom

A. One flesh, vv.1-9

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?" ³ He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" ⁴ They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." ⁵ And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.

What we need to understand about the context here is that at the time of Christ, it was really easy for men to divorce their wives. From first century Jewish rabbinical sources we see that a husband could divorce his wife if she had an annoying habit, or her cooking wasn't up to scratch, or even if he felt that she wasn't pretty any more – justified divorce for very petty things. Problem – left women very vulnerable to the whims of their husbands. For a woman to be cast aside by her husband in those times, abandon her to a life of certain poverty.

In verse 2, the Pharisees deliberately try to test Jesus in this regard and ask whether it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason. Jesus responds in the following verse and immediately points them back to Scripture, specifically the Law of Moses (last Sunday – saw that Jesus has not abolished the law!). So in verse 4, the Pharisees respond by referring to Deuteronomy 24:1-3, which states that a man can divorce his wife if he finds some indecency in her. Indecency? Sexual immorality.

So how then does Jesus reply to this? Verse 5 - **"Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment."** Hardness of heart? Human sinfulness. God permits divorce in certain circumstances – sexual immorality one of those circumstances – but even that is

just a concession from the Lord because of our hard hearts. Deuteronomy 24 by no means gives men a licence to divorce their wives for any reason. The Pharisees twisted this verse to justify divorce under any circumstance. Jesus shows them up here, and then puts marriage and divorce into perspective. Verse 6:

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

While the Pharisees are trying to find loopholes in Scripture for divorce, Jesus focuses on God's original intention and design for marriage, by quoting from Genesis 1:27. Here, from the very first few verses of Scripture, from the creation account, Jesus shows us that marriage is rooted in cosmology. Cosmology? How God created and ordered the world – our origins.

We see an important truth here: In the beginning, God created humans as male and female. Both male and female were created and designed in God's image, as Genesis 1:26 tells us, and this distinction of humans into two genders was seen by God as "very good" as Genesis 1:31 declares.

Implications? Obvious truth is that there are only two genders, male and female. Contrary to the crazy claims of some (Google) that there are 64 to 72 different genders! Here in Genesis 1, we see that it is not we who decide what gender we are according to our own feelings (if I feel like a girl then I am...) – no, gender is determined by God alone who created us as we are – either male or female, in his image.

Why are humans created as male and female? Jesus gives us the reason in verse 7,

⁷ 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,

Another quote from Genesis, this time chapter 2:24. Note – Jesus' answers to the Pharisees are rooted in the story of creation – God's original intention for mankind. Here – man and woman were created to complement each other. We are created equal before God as image bearers, yet we're created different and distinct from one another. We've been created for one another, to need each other. Genesis 2:18 – not good for man to be alone, for this reason God made him a *helper fit for him* – a woman, to marry and to hold fast to, be fruitful and to multiply (Gen 1:28).

Implicit rejection of homosexuality, which is being increasingly normalised in our culture. God's design for marriage – one man and one woman – (heterosexual) is rooted in the very fabric of God's design for the universe. There is not one shred of evidence in the Bible that remotely affirms homosexuality. On the contrary, it consistently reveals homosexual behaviour as sinful, as contrary to nature. Instead we see God's design for marriage is the complementary relationship between man and woman.

Not only are male and female designed to complement one another, but verses 8-9 continue: **⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. ⁹ What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."**

Man and woman are designed for marriage, as verse 8 tells us, "the two shall become one flesh." joined together by God himself. The purpose of marriage is that two opposites come together, united by God himself to become one flesh. It is this one flesh union that Ephesians 5:22 calls a "mystery." A man and his wife – two different people, brought together for a life-time and made into one.

Note something very important in what Jesus says here in verse 9 – God has joined man and wife together. It's he alone who established marriage – it was his idea. It's not a man-made invention or a product of culture. It's a common grace institution given by God himself as a blessing for both believer and unbeliever. Because he established it, he alone gets to define what it is – a union between one man and one woman. Anything else simply isn't marriage.

The implication of this truth – that it's God who has joined man and wife together as one flesh, means then that it's not up to man to separate this union. This is really the heart of Jesus' point to the Pharisees. The Pharisees are looking for all sorts of excuses and technicalities in order to permit divorce. For Jesus, divorce should be the furthest thing from our minds. Because it's God himself who has joined together husband and wife as one flesh, it's not up to man to separate what God has brought together.

We see here – Jesus holds to a very high view of marriage. It's designed by God to be for life. Culture – when it's no longer convenient for us, can just leave. For those of us in Christ – that it not an option. As challenging as marriage can be, as far as possible we have to work for reconciliation and sort it out. As we Christ has forgiven us, so we need to forgive each other 7 times 77. To reach a point where you are no longer willing to extent forgiveness to

your spouse is a reflection that your heart has grown hard and you need to seriously ask yourself where you are with the Lord. By the Spirit's strength, all believers have given the grace to forgive each other, no matter what.

B. Divorce and adultery, vv.10-12

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

Jesus leaves the Pharisees and continues talking to his disciples about the issue of divorce and remarriage. He says in verse 11 that if someone divorces and then remarries, they commit adultery. How come? He's following on from what he's just explained. In God's eyes, a husband and wife are still married, they are one flesh, as it is God who has brought them together - even if they get divorced. So to go and marry someone else is really committing adultery with your spouse. Serious issue, shows how seriously we should take marriage.

At the same time, we need to always interpret Scripture with Scripture. Though divorce needs to be avoided at all costs, the truth is that not all divorce is necessarily sinful. There are two exceptions in Scripture where this is the case.

Firstly, when there has been sexual immorality in the marriage. Matthew 19:9, **"And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."** The nature of sexual immorality is that it ruptures the one flesh union and therefore the offended partner is within all his or her rights to pursue a divorce.

Secondly, when an unbelieving spouse wants to leave the marriage. 1 Corinthians 7:15, **"But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace."** If your husband or wife who is not a Christian, walks away from the marriage, as tragic as that is, the Lord permits us to be free from this.

So for a divorce that has been permitted biblically (two cases), if one were to remarry, you would not be committing adultery. There is a legitimate break in the union and therefore you can remarry and it's not sinful.

C. Our faithful Bridegroom

We should be struck by Jesus' high view of marriage – that it's God's design for one man and one woman, becoming one flesh, joined together by God for a lifetime. Purpose? Mutual growth, blessing, sanctification, fruitfulness, fulfilment, joy and wholeness. Marriage is not based on our emotional whims, which when the chips are down means that we can end the relationship when we don't feel that it's working for us. Because marriage is covenantal in nature – un-breaking promise to love each other through thick and thin, means have to sort it out and continually forgive one another, as Christ has forgiven us.

In Ephesians 5:23, Paul compares marriage relationship to Christ's relationship with us. As the church, we are his bride and he is our faithful bridegroom. He chose us in our sinful state, when we were unlovable and he loved us first when we were not even seeking him. He forgave our sins and continues to forgive us our sins. He washed us clean and is forming us as his pure, spotless bride. He has set his covenantal, steadfast love upon us. He has united us to himself by his Spirit, whom he's placed within us. Because of all this, he will never forsake us, never abandon us, never divorce us. In Christ, we are indeed his forever.

Conclusion

Perhaps in the light of all this you feel hopeless – maybe you are divorced or going through a divorce – and maybe it was an unbiblical divorce. Perhaps still wracked with guilt over sexual sin, adultery, unfaithfulness or any other sin that you've committed. Reality is that one day you will appear before the judgement seat of Christ and you will need to account for your sins. Without trusting in him – you will face God's just wrath for eternity for your sins.

But God has not left us in our sins and condemnation. In the fullness of time, God sent his Son to earth to redeem sinners for himself. He went to the cross and faced the just punishment that you deserved. He suffered and died in your place. But on the third day he rose again, defeating sin and death. Purchased forgiveness of sins and eternal life for all who trust in him.

Repent and receive Christ. Jesus said in Mark 3:28 that every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven in his name. Trust in his word that your sins are forgiven, conscience cleansed. Know that Christ your faithful bridegroom will never abandon you or let you go, will love you with an everlasting steadfast love. And that one day our bridegroom, will come for us, his bride and invite us to enjoy a great wedding feast – finest of wines and foods – he will be our God, and we his people, for ever in his presence.

Amen