

FOLLOWING CHRIST IN YOUR MARRIAGE

Mark 10:1-12

What do you think of when you think of following Jesus? Making disciples, of course. Preaching the Word. Sharing the gospel. Taking up a cross. Maybe missions. Distributing Bibles. It's all part of it. But how many of us think about marriage? Because that's what Mark's gospel is going to teach us today. We're learning through this gospel to follow Jesus and be "Servants, like the Savior." Today we see what that looks like in our marriages.

This is important because as they say, "*As the family goes, so goes the nation, so goes the world.*" But I think I have a more complete version of that: "*As the marriage goes, so goes the family, so goes the nation, so goes the world.*" What you are seeing out there in our nation this week and today, the chaos and the disorder, is due in great part to the breakdown of the family, starting with marriage. Divorce rates are through the roof, even among Christians or those who call themselves Christians and as we're going to see, it's nothing new under the sun. It's something that Jesus dealt with in His day. And we're going to find out what He has to say about it all in Mark 10:1-12. Single or married, it's a pressing issue we need to consider.

"Getting up, He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them. Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

It's been a while since we've been in Mark. Let's remember our context.

I. JESUS IS ON HIS FINAL JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM. (V. 1)

He's heading to Jerusalem all the way from Caesarea Philippi in the north, making His way south and teaching along the way. His ministry in Galilee is done and every step He takes, He is knowingly taking towards the cross. And so His teaching, as we've seen, is really aimed at how we should take up our cross and follow Him as well. His disciples don't understand all that yet though.

Verse 1 tells us that Jesus and the disciples are traveling toward Judea, ultimately Jerusalem, and is beyond the Jordan (east of it) in an area also known as **Perea**. Chapter 10 of Mark we could call His Perea ministry chapter. He's over here because this was a popular travel corridor for Jews who wanted to go around Samaria. And since Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, some of the Samaria didn't welcome Him this time either (Lk. 9:51-56).

But as Jesus is teaching, we have this stereotypical scene again where the Pharisees come out of the woodwork again like termites to come and pester Him. And they ask Him a highly disputed topic in His day and ours concerning the D-word, and I don't mean Dallas. We're talking about divorce. And I don't even like to say the word. I'm going to give several marriage tips today like I send the men in our text group (text "@cbcmensm" to 81010 to join that) and this is one of them.

❖ **Marriage tip #1 – Never use the D-word in your marriage.**

That's what we call it in my house. It is a word that my wife and I do not even consider to be part of our vocabulary and I counsel others to do the same. It is an awful word that we do not even allow ourselves to use in our home or even consider using. It's out of the question for us. Not an option on the table. But since man's heart is incredibly hard, it is a reality we have to deal with as Jesus did. Like today, many in Jesus' day treated their marriage license like a receipt. Just bring back the shoes you bought at the store that didn't fit quite right and exchange them for some other ones. Divorce was common-place. Easy. Despite God's attitude towards divorce in the OT, the Pharisees concocted an entire easy-divorce system to justify their wife-swapping scheme. And here's what they're really up to by bringing up this topic.

II. THE PHARISEES ATTEMPT TO DISCREDIT & INCRIMINATE JESUS. (VV. 2-4)

Matthew 19:3, the parallel passage, reveals their exact question, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" Even though on the surface it seems like a good and honest question, there is an incredibly wicked agenda behind it.

For one, they're attempting to **incriminate** Jesus and get Him to say something that would throw a red flag with the governing authorities. He's in **Perea** as we noted and this region happens to be under the rule of **Herod Antipas and Herodias**, names we are familiar with from chapter 6. This is the same couple who had beheaded John the Baptist for telling them that they're relationship was unlawful. Herod had divorced his wife and married Herodias, his brother's wife, who had herself divorced her husband. And because John called them out on this, Herodias developed a deep grudge against him and his head ended up on a platter. So by getting Jesus to openly take the same stance on marriage in this area (and they knew His position from the sermon on the Mount where He said even if you lust after a woman you've committed adultery – we're all adulterers in our hearts) they were hoping it would put Jesus in the same position. It's a sinister attack.

Secondly, they want to draw Jesus into an issue that is highly divisive among the people and **discredit** Him to I don't know, half His followers possibly. They're out to stir up the crowds who wouldn't take such a conservative approach to marriage. The reason why it would cause so much division is because what you had during this time were **two main schools of thought** on divorce that revolved around the interpretation of the only place in the Law of Moses that talks about it in **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**. So let's turn there and take a look at it. When Jesus in response to their question asks, "What did Moses command you?" this is what they cite. As always, Jesus makes them deal with the Word of God to cut through all the opinions and ideas of society and gets right to the truth. It's not the opinions and philosophies of men that matter. What matters is, "What does God say about this?" We let the Word shape our convictions, not the climate of the culture.

But study Deuteronomy 24:1-4 with me, thinking critically about what it says...

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens, if she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found **some indecency** in her, that he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her away from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and send her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife..."

And the dispute between the two schools of thought revolved mainly around what was meant by “**some indecency**”. That’s the burning question. And you had this one rabbi named **Shammai** who said this was referring to fornication only – sexual immorality. He took a conservative, literal approach. The other more popular interpretation that these Pharisees seemed to side with, based on their response, was of the school was of **Hillel**. To say that Hillel interpreted this very loosely would be an understatement. He took it to say anything you wanted it to say.

Under the Hillel form of thought, one could divorce his wife for anything they thought was indecent/shameful: *spoiling your dinner* by maybe burning it or oversalting it; for literally *letting your hair down*; for turning so fast in public that her skirt came up and *exposed her ankles*; for *talking to another man* other than her husband; or for being *infertile*. It was a view that allowed men to divorce their wife for basically anything, anytime they wanted too. In fact one rabbi, Aqiba, said you could divorce simply for finding someone prettier than she is, since it is said, “if she find no favor in his eyes.” They were using this as a way to justify their sin – to make it easy to quit and satisfy their lusts.

But **what is this indecency?** Personally I don’t think it would make sense under the Law for this indecency to be referring to adultery since the penalty for adultery was not divorce but death by stoning. The word in our language might be literally translate “a matter of shameful nakedness”. And through my studies this week, I think it’s referring to some sort of sinful behavior outside of adultery that would violate normal social responsibility and civilized culture that would bring disrespectⁱ on the nation of Israel or the family. I think it’s intentionally not defined because there might be a wide range of situations that this word encapsulates. A woman who might want out of marriage and disgrace her husband might do something shameful but not totally go to adultery because of the penalty. Maybe she reveals herself but doesn’t commit adultery. Or, as it’s been suggested, the husband finding out she wasn’t a virgin after all as she said.

What I want you to notice though from Deuteronomy 24 is that **there is no command or explicit permission to divorce** here.ⁱⁱ It is merely describing an unfortunate situation and how it should be handled, reluctantly. The emphasis is not what God allows (giving license to divorce), but what He doesn’t allow. It has to do with **regulating and limiting divorce, not permitting it. And it discourages a hasty divorce**ⁱⁱⁱ... because if a husband decides to send the wife of his youth away, he must give her a certificate of divorce and not take her back no matter what happens. It’s really out of protection for the woman. This is protection and provision for the woman, to keep men from making her a personal pawn or possession in their wife swapping scheme.

It makes the men think that they’d better think twice before they go sending away the wife of their youth for a mere fling, and then when he gets tired of her too, thinks he can go back to the wife of his youth. It protects the woman’s freedom and right to remarry. God is not sanctioning or commanding divorce but is **limiting its sinfulness and consequences**. And it’s only tolerated because of the hardness of man’s heart. It’s just describing **what to do in the case of something that has happened** – for the hard-hearted knucklehead moments. Like Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7:11, “A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.” Paul is saying this is the command, but in case it has happened already, because it does, here’s what you do in this situation.

As zealous as these Pharisees claimed they were for God, it's amazing to think of how man can with a slight of the hand turn a limitation on divorce into a permission to divorce. Especially considering God's attitude towards it in the OT.

❖ **God's attitude towards divorce: He hates it. (Mal. 2:13-16)**

God had Malachi address a situation in his day, not long before this, where some Jewish men were sending the wife of their youth away in exchange for foreign, Gentile women they weren't to intermarry with in the first place. God was tired of seeing men act religious who weren't honoring and loving their wives as they should.

Malachi 2:13 says, [*brackets mine*]

"This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. Yet you say, "For what reason?" [*Here's why*] Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking godly offspring [*divorce damages the children*]? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. "For I hate divorce," says the Lord, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the Lord of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

These Pharisees are about to find out from God Himself, standing before them, why He hates it. Chuck Swindoll really put into perspective what's going on here. Them asking about divorce from Deuteronomy is like James Madison, the "Father of the Constitution," in disguise, walking into Yale and Harvard laws schools and telling them they're interpreting the constitution wrong. The Giver of the Law had come to correct them. He goes back to the 1st marriage.

III. **JESUS TAKES THEM BACK TO HIS DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE. (VV. 5-12)**

First, He clarifies that this Mosaic provision was in the Law because they were **hard-hearted** sinful people (v. 5). The Greek term is *sklerokardia* reminds us of sclerosis of the heart – they had stiff, thick hearts that struggled to pump blood and so bring life to the body. Men's hearts aren't flexible to the Word and so knucklehead moments happen. They don't always bend to God's commands and so it was there to deal with that, should it occur.

But He says, "From the beginning of creation," it wasn't this way. He quotes Genesis 1 & 2. And this is the part of the text that society today would like to call *hate speech*. But I would call it *life-giving speech* because if we'd just apply it, we'd realize how life-giving it is and how if you just apply it, it can prevent the incredible pain one experiences in divorce. Divorce is painful. It's like ripping apart two fingers you've superglued together but in an internal sense. Those who are the greatest supporters of married couples are often those who have been through it. But let's look at several truths from Jesus' teaching on marriage and marriage tips that coincide with it.

1. **Truth #1 – Marriage is created by God. (v. 6)**

Verse 6, "In the beginning, God made them..." He created Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, and then He immediately married them. Marriage was His idea. And their marriage is the exemplary pattern of God's design for marriage for the rest of time. Genesis 1 & 2 reveals the origin of marriage. If you don't understand Genesis, you can't understand this world or marriage. It amazes me that so many people reject God & Genesis and still get married. They're just think they're following cultural norms and not really thinking about why they're doing it. It's God's idea. Adam didn't even know it wasn't good for him

to be alone. God has to make all the animals walk past Adam in order for him to realize they all had partners but he didn't and it wasn't good for him to be alone (Gen. 2:18-20).

❖ **Marriage tip: Remember marriage is good.**

He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord (Proverbs 18:22).

2. **Truth #2 – Marriage is between one man and one woman. (v. 6)**

This means two things: one, it is a **monogamous** relationship, meaning it's only between 2 people (not polygamous). God only created one man and one woman. Secondly under that heading, it's **heterosexual – the two people must be of the opposite sex**. God did not create two men or two women. It wasn't Adam and Steve or Alice and Eve... it was Adam and Eve. Any sort of other homosexual "marriage" between two of the same sex is not a marriage by God's definition. Even nature itself, human anatomy, tells you that won't work. If the first two people were of the same gender, it's safe to say you and I wouldn't exist because they couldn't procreate. It takes a man and a woman to be married naturally and married in God's eyes, regardless of what any human institution or document says.

❖ **Marriage tip: Differences are by design.**

Realizing that you and your wife are created different will make a world of difference. A lot of folks get stuck on this, thinking we need to be exactly the same. But we weren't created that way. Temperament differences aside, men and women are just different in the way they think and talk and hear. It's like one processes information in blue and one in pink. It's not wrong, it's just different and it's by design. There's some elements about us that trying to change wouldn't be natural or good. Gender differences are ingrained and so are temperaments (*See Spirit-Controlled Temperament* by Tim LaHaye). You're a team that way. The Holy Spirit can do the changing without destroying our individuality.

3. **Truth #3 – Marriage is permanent. (vv. 7-9)**

By permanent I mean **lifelong, not eternal**. Jesus clarifies that in Mark 12:25. But Jesus points out here from Genesis 2:24 that a man and woman are to **leave** their parents and **cleave** to their spouse. The word suggests a **permanent gluing and melting together** by God. "What God has joined together, let no man separate them." Like Malachi 2 said, your wife is "your wife by covenant." There is supposed to be a binding, life-long agreement between three parties – husband, wife and God. "For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health." Even if you lose the warm and fuzzy feelings, the sacrificial, Christlike love acts based on the covenant and not on the feelings. That's love. It endures all things and doesn't seek its own (1 Corinthians 13).

❖ **Marriage tip: Learn to leave and cleave.**

Many spouses want to bring their parents into every situation, every argument, every decision – which can cause a lot of problems. Marriage is, you let go of relying on your parents and embrace one another, relying on God and each other as much as possible. And if you're going to cleave well, I'd add to that: **Stay current. Communicate**. Apologize when you have to. Forgive when you have to. "Forgiven people forgive people," Steve Saint said. That's always the biblical ideal for conflict. If you get in an argument and say something knuckleheaded, you deal with it because ignoring it won't make it go away. It'll just make you a bitter person and give Satan an opportunity. "Don't let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph. 4:26). The Love and Respect series, by the way, said the more mature

will move first to reconcile.^{iv} Unforgiveness and unresolved issues put tensions on the glue and it's painful. So stay current. Be transparent. Cleave.

4. Truth #4 – Marriage is the greatest earthly relationship there is. (v. 8)

Genesis 2:24-25 says a man is to be “joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” There is a one flesh dynamic in a marriage that is more than sharing a bank account. The NT reveals this is talking about the act of marriage, the sexual relationship. But it's clearly also a whole blending of lives together that ties a husband and wife together closer than blood can. It's the most intimate earthly relationship there is.

And I think a lot of folks miss this too but it's incredibly important. The greatest incentive I know of for maintaining purity, if you care about the glory of God at all or the divine intention in it, is that **marriage reflects who God is.**

❖ **Marriage reflects the oneness relationship of the Triune God.**

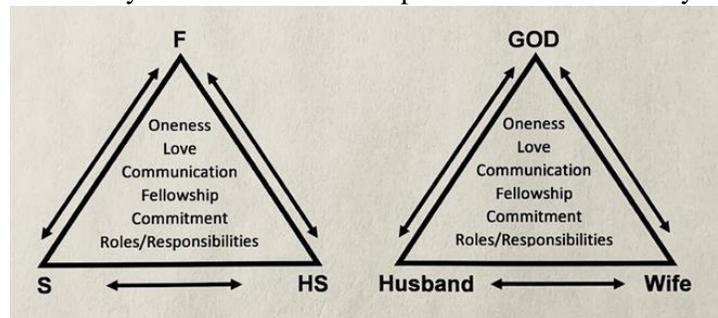
We have one God in three Persons. And if you **take the Genesis expressions together, side by side, about who God says He is and how He describes the creation and marriage of man it makes sense. You see more of how we're made in His image.** God said “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness,” it say, “in the image of God He created him”.

“Let us” [plural] make man in “Our image” and “Our likeness” (1:26-27)

+

“Male and female [plural] He created them” / “joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh”/bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (1:27, 2:24)

There's something going on here that's so deep it's almost difficult to explain but these two things go together. One male and one female, **plural**. But then Eve was taken from Adam's side (bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh – not made from the dust like Adam) and was joined together again as one flesh – so there is also a **oneness**. There's a plurality and oneness to God as well. Just as there is oneness, love, communication, fellowship, commitment and roles & responsibilities in the Godhead, so it is in your marriage with God. With God in your relationship we could say it's a 1+1+1=1 relationship. This is reflected in unity ceremonies when couples tie 3 cords into 1 – you are one unit.



❖ **Marriage also reflects the relationship of Christ & the Church.**

You can read about this more in Ephesians 5:21-33. For the sake of time, I'll briefly touch on this. Ephesians 5 says Christ is to the Church like the husband is to the wife. Christ

loves the Church and leads it with love, dying for her in love, and so is the husband supposed to love his wife. And if he does love his wife as the NT emphasizes, she can respect and submit him like the Church respects and submits to Christ. And when you do things God's way, it just works. When you don't, you end up with a microcosm of society today where male chauvinism and female liberation movements battle for power and position, which is a curse of the fall according Genesis 3:16. What I want you to remember from this is that marriage is very theological and God-honoring. It is not cultural. And it has been that way since day 6 of creation.

5. **Truth #5 – Marriage is an act of God. (v. 9)**

Jesus says, "What *God has joined together*, let no man separate." So even though we come together and take an oath before men and a man officiates it and signs it, there is more going on at the marriage ceremony than you see. God is the one writing it down in heaven. He is the one doing the wedding. I tell people, "God is the greatest witness here today. He is the Main Guest." He Regardless of human courts and agencies say, marriage is an act of God and if He considers them married, they're married, even if man says they're not.

Moving on to verses 10-12, Jesus says to the disciples, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her [think Jews & Herod]; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man she is committing adultery." Why would He add that when only Jewish men divorced their wives and not wives their husbands? Because it's something a Roman woman might do – He too, like John, is calling out Herodias.

The only **exception** Jesus gives for divorce and grounds for remarriage is sexual immorality. We see that in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:4-5 which include Jesus' famous **except clause**: "whoever divorces his wife, **except for immorality**, and marries another woman commits adultery." The Greek word there for immorality is the word *porneia* and not *moicheia*. *Moicheia* which would be strictly referring to adultery. *Porneia* though, from where we get our word for pornography, sort of sweeps up the wide range of sexual sin and not just adultery. It's anything that dishonors the marriage bed by immorality. Any extended, unrepentant sexual sin would be included in that, Greek scholars say. There's a big difference between a one-time affair that leaves a personal genuinely repentant and longing for forgiveness, and a habitual sin that one refuses to repent of.

The overall NT teaching on exceptions also include **death** (1 Cor. 7:39-40), and **abandonment** of a believing spouse by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor. 7:12-16). Of course, there are other complicated situations like abuse or felony activity or substance abuse that would be treated with special, prayerful counsel and over an extended period of time but that's not for us to try and articulate here through hypothetical situations. I'd rather not presume upon the Word of God and special situations require special attention. For more information on this subject you'll want to study 1 Corinthians 7. I've also included in your notes here a sermon that I think does a wonderful job of explaining that chapter and the grounds for marriage and remarriage.

Search: John MacArthur's sermon *Marriage, Divorce, and Singleness*
<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-359/marriage-divorce-and-singleness>

Let's remember that we've all messed up in this area in one way or another. Some have had to make less-than-ideal life changes for reasons you don't have all the details too, so extend grace and

not painful scars as a result of this study today. The reality is we're all adulterers by heart and thank God for the continual cleansing and forgiveness in Christ. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The reason why Mark doesn't include more specifics about divorce and remarriage is because that isn't his intention. His intention is to show as one bible scholar said, "There is no such thing as a "good divorce." Every divorce witnesses to a failure of God's purpose in marriage. Perhaps in a dangerous or abusive marriage, divorce is less evil, but Mark intentionally leaves Jesus's teaching on this subject in its unqualified hyperbolic form."^v It's blunt to leave an impression.

Remember Mark is about a main theme: being a disciple of Jesus. Following Him. Surrendering to Him. **He wants us to understand what it means to be a disciple and follow Jesus with respect to marriage.** It means being faithful. Sticking it out. Forgiven as Christ forgave you. Getting your eyes off yourself and looking to your spouse's interests. To live and die for someone else even if they don't deserve it. The hardest place to be spiritual is in the home and maybe **the greatest grounds that try how much we understand the cross is right there in marriage.** So that's my **challenge question** for us today: *Are you including your marriage in light of the call to discipleship? Are you following Christ in marriage?*

❖ **The biblical ideal in marital conflict is always Christlike forgiveness and restoration.**^{vi}

Just because there are biblical grounds for divorce doesn't mean it has to happen. The greatest examples of Christlikeness are those who have been through a lot but stick it out. Ray Stedman said, "A successful marriage...is not one without problems; it is one where the problems are being worked out, where the husband and wife do not split but stick together, face up to their problems, discover the hardness of heart that is there, and learn how God can soften it. In other words, it is a process, not a single production. It is a pilgrimage, not a six weeks' performance."^{vii}

Instead of looking for a way out, look for a way to stick together. And the way is through the strength that comes through a relationship with the Lord. Through our relationship with the Lord we allow His love and forgiveness for our sins to soften our hearts to be able to extend His love and forgiveness to our spouse. **Serve your spouse like the Savior.** But you have to stay close the Lord because I think an even fuller statement than the one introduction we saw is, "*As your following Christ goes, so goes the marriage, so goes the family, so goes the nation, so goes the world.*"

ⁱ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Mark 9-16* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015), 58.

ⁱⁱ Ibid, 58.

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert Stein, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 456.

^{iv} Emerson Eggerichs, *Love and Respect* series.

^v Stein, 459.

^{vi} Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective, Vol. 3* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2017), 180.

^{vii} Ray Stedman, Mark S. Mitchell, *The Power of His Presence: A Year of Devotions from the Writing of Ray Stedman* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 2006), 30.