

READ Mark 8:34

I want us to back up a bit in Mark's Gospel to remind us of this all-important text that sets the tone for what is to follow within the rest of Mark's Gospel. Let's remember that Jesus has just acknowledged His identity as the Messiah of God, and He took that reality even further by speaking about what He would have to endure as such. Recall that Peter was not a fan of what Jesus had to say, and he even went so far as to take Jesus aside and tell him how such things would not take place. Jesus responds by leveling an even stronger rebuke towards Peter by saying Peter's concerns were more inline with Satan's concerns than God's. It is at this point that Jesus calls the crowds together and delivers this foundational teaching of what it means to be a disciple of His.

He then proceeds to build upon this all-important foundation with some very strong and difficult teachings. In **9:14-29**, Jesus admonishes the Apostles for their lack of faith. He then rebukes them for their pride and arrogance in seeking to be the greatest among themselves (**9:33-37**). He then engages in a very serious discussion with them concerning the absolute necessity of avoiding sin at all cost even if it comes at the cost of great sacrifice (**9:42-50**). As we continue into the following text of **Mark 10:1-12**, the strong and difficult teachings of Jesus are only going to continue as He is going to teach on the issue of marriage and divorce

This teaching of Jesus is just as needed today as it was nearly 2,000 years ago. We are living in a time where marriage is not respected as the God-ordained institution that it is. It is seen as something that is optional when it comes to engaging in sexual relationships with others, and it is seen as something that can just as easily be ended as one might end a gym membership. The honor that is to be given to marriage and the marriage bed is sorely lacking (**Hebrews 13:4**). Many give it a try and simply leave the relationship if it isn't working out like they wish it would. The consequences for such have been disastrous for our society and societies across the world. According to a study in 2014, 40-50% of children in the USA were born out of wedlock, and a 2010 study showed that nearly 10% of children were being raised in a single parent household which is up nearly double from 1960. We find a little relief that the divorce numbers are down, but that is likely a result of people just not getting married and instead cohabiting for some time before splitting up. (statistics cited here can be found at <https://ourworldindata.org/marriages-and-divorces>)

This is an all-important issue, yet I realize this is a difficult issue to think upon considering emotions that are usually involved in such a subject. Yet as disciples of Jesus, we must lay aside our desires and emotions, move past the influences of the world, and submit fully to His lordship as we strive to do all things according to His will. Let's read this text together, consider what is found within it, and ask some questions that can help us to make needed application from what the Incredible Jesus teaches us about His desire for marital commitment.

Mark 10:1-12

A. The Pharisees test Jesus concerning His teaching on marriage & divorce (10:1,2)

1. As we trace the footsteps of Jesus, we find Him moving southward from Capernaum (**9:33**) into region of Judea where we will eventually find Him approaching Jerusalem for the final time. The crowds become aware that he is once again in their vicinity so they converge on Him, and He continues His custom of teaching them while the opportunity presents itself. It is in this moment we find Pharisees coming to Him and testing Him. This particular test revolves around the issue of marriage and divorce, but why was this the test in this time and place?
2. There are a few options as far as possible reasons go, and any of these could be either entirely or partially responsible for this particular test over this particular issue.

- a) First off, the Pharisees could have simply been looking to have their “rights” as Jewish men validated by Jesus. Jewish culture allowed for men to put their wives away (more on this in a moment), and they wanted to be told that this was truly permitted for them to do.
- b) They could also have been asking this in order to put Jesus at odds with various groups within the Jewish community. There were various views on the divorce issue, and any teaching and/or opinion Jesus gave would surely get Him in some sort of trouble. The Pharisees could have been thinking this trouble could go a long way in hurting Jesus’s reputation and influence among the Jewish people.
- c) Maybe the most trouble they were trying to get Jesus in would have been with Herod Antipas. Let’s recall that Jesus is back in Judea which was ruled by the same Herod who had put John the Baptist to death because of his teaching concerning Herod’s own marriage and divorce situation (**6:14-29**). If Jesus held to the same teaching as John then perhaps these Pharisees were thinking they could again harm Jesus’s influence.

Regardless of the motivation behind the test presented before Jesus, He wasn’t going to back down or pretend He is simply making up His own answer to the question. We know this is the case because He immediately shifts the conversation to consider what God has stated on the matter.

B. Jesus first questions the command of God through Moses on the matter. (10:3-5)

1. We need to consider the language that Jesus uses in His initial response to their question. He responds with, *“What did Moses command you?”* First, though Jesus specifically mentions Moses, we need to recognize the understanding that Jesus is referring to God. Moses was God’s representative among the people, the Law was referred to by his name, and his commands were understood to be God’s commands. Therefore, when Jesus asked this question, we can understand it as meaning, *“What did God command you?”* I’m have a great deal of confidence in saying that we would all say this is a good approach to any question we might have concerning faith and practice. We should expect no less from Jesus.
2. At the same time, we should almost expect for the Pharisees to not answer His question well. *“They said, ‘Moses permitted us to write divorce papers and send her away.’” (10:4)* The reference they are making in this moment is to **Deuteronomy 24:1-4** where Moses makes a provision within the Law for a man to send his wife away if he somehow displeases him through her finding something indecent about her. The Pharisees might present this as an open and shut case, but even among the religious leaders of their time there was not consensus understanding on this issue. The two prevailing schools of thought belonged to those who followed the teachings of Rabbi Hillel who was quite lenient in his interpretation of this text. This live of reasoning allowed for a man to put his wife away for almost any reason even something as petty as burning his food as she cooked. (Wiersbe *Mark*, p.118) The opposing school of Rabbi Shammai took a much stricter view that taught this certificate could only be given if premarital sin had been committed. (Wiersbe *Mark*, p.118)
3. Yet, I want us to recognize what the Pharisees were missing when it came to what Jesus asked. They answered with what Moses had permitted, but they failed to answer with what had been commanded. There is a strong difference between what had been commanded concerning marriage and divorce and what Moses (indirectly God) had permitted because of the hardness of their hearts. This is precisely what Jesus means when He highlights that distinction between what God had originally decreed concerning marriage and what He then decided to allow in order to deal with the evil ways Jewish men were treating their wives in various situations. We have to recognize the very powerless position Jewish women found themselves in. Marriage was nearly a necessity in order for Jewish women to be supported

and cared for. If they were divorced without the cause of adultery (in which case both people involved were to be stoned **Deuteronomy 22:22; Leviticus 20:10**) with no ability to remarry then they would basically be put out to die. This heartless treatment was remedied with this allowance by God and Moses, but it was not to be the normal course of action!

C. Jesus reaffirms God's original design for marriage. (10:6-9)

1. We know this was something only allowed to remedy the evils of Jewish men because Jesus now takes those involved in this conversation even further back than the time of the Law of Moses! Jesus takes everyone back to the very beginning where God originally instituted the design and focus of the marriage union. Here's what I want us to recognize:
 - a) *"from the beginning of creation"* — The issue they were dealing with at the moment wasn't some new invention that was needing to be ironed out. Jesus wants the hearer to recognize marriage as being the oldest institution existing among mankind.
 - b) *"God made..."* — The next important recognition is to acknowledge that marriage, being from the beginning of creation, is something that was given by God. Men did not think up and create marriage. The government did not think up and create marriage. This is something that is created and given by God, and He, therefore, has the right to design marriage to operate the way He desires.
 - c) *"male and female"* — This aspect of marriage, the fact of it being between one man and one woman, is certainly something that has been under attack by our society in a growing way over the past few decades in various ways. The first that comes to mind is that concerning homosexuality. Our culture is infatuated with the idea of men marrying men and women marrying women being the same as the unions that exists between a man and a woman. To put it simply, that is not marriage as God designed it in the beginning. Try as our culture might to make these relationships equal, they simply are not because God did not design such from the beginning. The exact same thing can and should also be said for polygamous relationships. They go against the original design God created in the beginning. What Jesus says here is also important to remember because it does speak against the claim that Jesus never condemned homosexual unions. The fact that He specifies one man and one woman in this text eliminates any other union as being legitimate marriage before God.
 - d) *"...the two become one flesh...no longer two, but one flesh"* — These statements along with what Jesus quotes from **Genesis 2:24** impresses upon us the reality of marriage being a joining of two lives together in every way possible. There is to exist a unity that is not present in any other relationship that exists among mankind. There is to be a unity in focus, purpose, and fulfillment. One is to fulfill the needs of his or her spouse in a way that no one else on earth can. When you think of a husband, his wife should immediately come to mind and vice versa for the two have become one.
 - e) *"what God has joined together, let no one separate."* — It is in this last statement that Jesus gives the resounding answer to the question of whether or not it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife, and the answer is no. No, a man is not to divorce his lawfully married wife because his pledging of himself in marriage to his wife is not simply a cultural contract, but it is a divinely established covenant before God. Two people have been joined into one, and it is not permissible for anyone to separate what God has joined together. Anyone who does such a thing will only incur God's judgment.
2. Let's be honest...this is an incredibly difficult teaching for many people to acknowledge and follow. It is very evident to me that these Pharisees and others were simply looking for ways to get out of something they had no more desire to be in or to try to help make work. Sadly, this

is the same problem that many face today. Marriage is not understood, and it is treated with a lackadaisical attitude that leads to many people hopping in and out of marriage as if they were simply dating. Before we get into our application questions, let's consider what Jesus has to say are the consequences of treating marriage without the proper respect.

D. Jesus details the serious consequences of breaking the marriage covenant. (10:10-12)

1. Once Jesus leaves the scene of this discussion with the Pharisees and others who might have been gathered in that moment, His disciples seek further understanding and clarification on this important matter. It is at this moment that Jesus emphasizes the simple and yet difficult standard God has set for marriage. *"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. Also, if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."* If we're being completely honest with what Jesus says here then we must admit this isn't a difficult teaching to understand. If a person, man or woman (which would have been a pretty extreme in the current Jewish society), divorces their spouse and they marry another one...they are guilty of committing adultery. They were joined by God to their lawful spouse in His eyes, and divorcing that spouse and pursuing a new spouse is adultery. This is very simply, plain, and clear. The rule is you don't divorce your spouse. You stay married for life.
2. Again, this isn't something that is complicated until we again consider the hardness of our hearts. What I mean by this is the exception given by Jesus in Matthew's accounts of Jesus teaching on this same subject in **Matthew 5:31,32 & 19:1-12**. Both of those texts speak to the exception that allows divorce as being sexual unfaithfulness on the part of a spouse. If this happens then Jesus seems to allow for a divorce to follow, but this doesn't mean it has to follow. Again, divorce isn't commanded, but it is simply allowed because of the hardness of a person's heart as exhibited through marital unfaithfulness.
3. Yet, that might leave us wondering why Mark doesn't feel the need to include this exception within this text. Why does he not mention it when Matthew does? It could be this is the case because it is being overtly implied through what he says about the two becoming one flesh. If a third person enters the picture then what God has joined has been violated and separated! The covenant that existed between the two has been violated and broken. Thus, it is implied that the dissolving of the marriage is possible at this point based upon the unfaithfulness. It could also be the case that the divorce exception isn't mentioned because Jesus doesn't even want to give the appearance of getting out of a marriage as an option. We must recognize the rule of marriage being for life as something sacred that God has joined together. Once two people give themselves to one another in marriage...it is expected that only death would do them part! Jesus doesn't seem to be in the business of handing out exceptions in this text because He desires for people to simply do what God designed from the beginning!

Is this serious business? Absolutely it is! This is why we can find the disciples thinking that it would be better off for people not to get married to begin with (**Matthew 28:11**) which is certainly an option that all people have a right to pursue. However, for those who choose to be married, we must take such a union seriously and treat it as the sacred and divinely given blessing that it is. Let's close by thinking a little deeper on the subject with a few application questions.

Application Questions

A. Do I understand the serious responsibility of entering into the marriage covenant?

1. A simple reason for the problems our society faces with marriage is in the fact that so many see it as expendable. They treat it as nothing more than glorified dating in which you can get married, divorced, married, and divorced as many times as you want without much repercussion at all. However, we must recognize this simply is not the reality of the way God

sees and esteems marriage. Let's reiterate, He created it and designed it to be for life. We can infer He did so because He recognized this type of arrangement as what is best for people individually from the standpoint of healthy relationships and bringing children into the world. Jumping from person to person or growing up in divorce-ridden families can easily leave a person emotionally scarred and with the wrong understanding of what marriage ought to be.

2. Therefore, each of us who are married or who plan to get married one day must approach our marriages or our prospective marriages with a high level of seriousness. We must recognize that entering into such a relationship is meant to be so with life-long longevity in mind. We must not enter into marriage thinking it is something that we can simply quit if it isn't going as smoothly as we'd like. We must recognize that it is our responsibility to give any children that are produced from this union every chance to have the proper picture of marriage modeled before them. Souls and healthy relationships for generations hang in the balance!

B. Am I willing to do my part to make my marriage what it should be?

1. Therefore, am I willing to do my part to make sure my marriage is what it ought to be before God? Another reason for the failings of so many marriages comes down to flat out selfishness. Husbands and wives are selfish and are only concerned with doing what will make them happy. If a spouse doesn't do this or that right or if he or she doesn't serve our every want and need...we'll just go find what we want elsewhere. This is selfishness in its purest form, it is sinful, and such an attitude, if left uncorrected, will condemn us eternally.
2. This means that I must be willing in my marriage to make sure that I am living selflessly for my spouse. I must recognize that I am the only person who has the ability to fulfill my spouse's needs. There is no one else given by God who can do for my spouse what I can. Do I understand that, and am I willing to take on that responsibility? If I'm not married yet then this must be something vital that I must consider. Is this person I am dating the person I am willing to give myself fully towards in every way? Is this the person I am willing to serve the rest of my life? If not, then either I need to find another person or I might just not be ready to enter this whole marriage thing.
3. Now, someone might respond with that sounding like a horrible situation because then my needs are never being met because I'm too busy giving myself fully to my spouse. Yet, this misses the understanding that it is expected that my spouse would have the exact same approach towards me! When we are selflessly serving one another...then we are both fully satisfied and taken care of in every regard, but it must start with me doing my part. I can only truly control what I do and may it never be said that I am the reason for a failed marriage.

C. Do I recognize the deeper spiritual principles patterned in marriage?

1. Finally, when we consider marriage, its serious nature, and my responsibility to make it everything God has designed it to be...am I think able to see the deeper spiritual truths and principles that are found within it? Let's remember that Paul is using the basic truths about marriage to help teach us about His own relationship with the church in **Ephesians 5:22-33**. Just as the wife respects and follows her husband and the husband loves and leads his life, so does the church respect and follow Christ as He loves and leads her. My marriage is to be a living lesson to those around me concerning what Jesus's relationship with the church ought to look like. That's a strong responsibility to bear, but it is also one of the most beautiful illustrations we can present to those around us...especially any children we might have.
2. But I also want us to recognize the serious nature of unfaithfulness whether within marriage or in our relationship with God. The pain and heartache that is caused by infidelity in marriage is only magnified in the eyes of God and Jesus when we are unfaithful to them. There is a

reason the Old Testament consistently uses adultery language when describing the unfaithfulness displayed by Israel as they sought after other gods. The Book of the Judges details such a time when the people left the faithful covenant with God and *“prostituted themselves with other gods, bowing down to them” (Judges 2:17)* The pain, we hopefully can only imagine, produced by marital faithfulness is the same type of pain we cause God when we forsake faithfulness to Him in order to seek our own desires in this life.

Main Point/Conclusion: *Marriage is God’s institution, and we will only enjoy the fullness of its blessings by doing it His way.*

Jesus came to this earth to proclaim the will of His heavenly Father to those who would hear Him, and He did so for their benefit. We must recognize the great benefits of doing that which is difficult in embracing humility, purity, and service towards others. When we are willing to do these things, not only will we enjoy better relationships with our fellow man, but we will enjoy the blessings of the closest relationship known to mankind in marriage. Certainly even the text itself reveals the difficulties of doing such, but what has been given is for our good. God’s way will always lead to blessings, and we will only find ourselves suffering when we or others deviate from the revealed design and plan. May each of us who are either in marriage or who are considering marriage takes these things to heart, and may those who are not in such or who do not desire to be in such be able to learn from the example of others so that we might all do our part in living as a part of the bride of Christ.