

The heading that the editors of my bible gave today's reading, is "Teaching About Divorce"... And that's probably a fair heading, because that's the question that the Pharisees asked, and ultimately, when Jesus' disciples quizzed Him further, that's the question He answered... But

- Jesus didn't really give the Pharisees teaching on divorce – He gave them teaching on "Marriage"
- He didn't want to talk about the legalities of what one can and cannot do, when it comes to ending a marriage
- He didn't want to enter into "What if's" and various curly scenarios & loop-holes...

When Jesus was asked the question, He shifted the conversation in a very different direction – to God's wonderful design of marriage...

So, that's what we're going to talk about today – God's design for marriage...

Let's Pray:

Heavenly Father, we want to thank you for Your good gift of marriage. And as we study the words of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ today, we ask that You would soften our hearts.

Lord, we stand before you today, as a people who are very aware that your design for marriage, is very different to that in our present culture (in many ways). The world can be very insistent, in telling us what we should think of marriage. But we ask that You would deaden the clamour of advice that comes from a broken world, and help us to recognise Your still, small voice...

But Lord, help us to also recognise the hardness of heart **we** carry into **our** marriages, and reveal to us, the personal changes **we** need to make, to bring glory to You in our marriages,
In Jesus' Name, Amen...

Righto:

When it comes to rejecting the word of God, put simply, there's 2 ways to go about it:

- Some people will be confronted with God's word on a matter, and simply reject it – “Nah, that's not for me”.
- But some others, not only reject it, but they feel that it's their duty, to set everybody else free from their delusion of God...

And, people like this, might see Bible teaching, such as we're having today, as something that the preacher is doing, or the church institution is using:

- To try and control people who don't know any better; and
- to force you to believe stuff that anybody who had any sense wouldn't believe; and
- to try and coerce you into rejecting worldly values, that in their eyes, are basic human freedoms and “Who is your god, to impinge on my freedoms”.....

And for those who take **this** position, sometimes, to try and argue, well, what they do, is they look for something which is 'contentious' – they look for a curly question that they think, is surly going to stump this person, and they pose that question

to them, not because they really want an answer, but they're looking for a means to try and catch that person out...

From time to time, I have to try and deal with stuff like that... But this isn't at all, a new thing. Jesus had to deal with it all the time. And today's reading, is one of those instances...

It's pretty evident, that the Pharisees **didn't want to learn from Jesus' teaching** – all they wanted, was to try and catch Him out... You see, they already had firmly established views on the matter of 'divorce'. There were a couple of different positions:

One teaching – from 'Shammai', took a conservative line, and would allow divorce only in cases of adultery... The other school of thought, was from 'Hillel', who took a much more liberal view, allowing divorce for virtually anything that the wife did, that displeased her husband – even if she made a habit of burning the bread when she baked, or if he was displeased with the way she looked,, it allowed for the husband to divorce his wife.

And so the Pharisees thought they'd be able to catch Jesus out – In their eyes, He'd already shown Himself as being lax on issues such as the Sabbath – In their eyes, Jesus was watering down their religious law,, so we'll ask Him about a moral issue, because He'll be lax on that too, and that'll prove He's not from God...

So to test Jesus, they asked Him, "Is it **lawful** for a man to divorce His wife?"

Now, that's a tough question, because there was actually no Old Testament law, saying whether it was or whether it wasn't... And the language here is interesting – basically, they're asking if the law allows it... But Jesus directs them to a "command" – "**What did Moses command you?**"

4 They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away."

Well "Not really...", it wasn't that Moses allowed them to write a certificate of divorce, and to send her away – that had become the practice of their community... At the time of Moses, they were already divorcing their wives... And in ancient times, it could be really tough, being a woman... If the husband just decided he was going to divorce her, he did... But what became of a divorced woman???

It was a society where a man could just discard a woman. He would divorce her, and discard her... There was no alimony; There was no welfare ; The title of land was held by the men – not the women... How could she even survive? It was terrible.

And so, in that culture, the best option, was for her to re-marry... But, how **could** she re-marry??? She was already married to somebody. What **evidence** was there, that she wasn't married to them any more??? And so, as a life-giving right of the divorced woman (in the Jewish culture), she would be given a certificate of divorce, so that she could marry another...

Alright, so this 'certificate of divorce', is more about looking after the one who had been divorced; it was more about looking after the one who had been rejected,, than what it was about allowing a man to divorce his wife...

But that's still not getting down to the guts of what Moses' **law** was actually about. Let's read it:

Deuteronomy 24:

If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, ² and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, ³ and her **second** husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, ⁴ then her **first** husband, who divorced her, is **not** allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of YHWH. Do not bring sin upon the land YHWH your God is giving you as an inheritance.

In Deuteronomy, Moses was giving them a law, that dealt with a bigger issue than divorce itself... It was about men who used excuses to divorce their wives, and who would *treat marriage like a progressive dance* – where they'd have one partner for a while, and then pack them off for a while, and then maybe get them back again later... I once heard

somebody describe it as “serial monogamy”... One wife – just keep changing her – might even have her back again...

And what Moses is saying here, is “This is an abomination to God”... This Law dealt with the constant changing of partners and wife-swapping. The Pharisees, with their legalistic brains, saw it from the perspective, “Moses allows divorce (because he didn’t forbid it). *Woo Hoo! – everybody change partners, now all join hands*”...

But Jesus is really clear: **Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.**

In the Scriptures, God makes it very clear, “He hates divorce”. Divorce is never seen as a good thing. But the reality is, God doesn’t seem to forbid it... Does He not forbid divorce, because it **is** part of God’s plan after all? No, not at all... It’s a pragmatic response – it’s something God allows (under certain circumstances), because of the hardness of heart of us humans... Under certain circumstances, this became the most life-giving option...

Do you know what the biggest cause of failed marriages is today? “Hardness of Heart”...

In fact, I think I’d go as far as to say, “That is the **only** cause of failed marriages”..

You’ve probably heard a statistic that gets trotted out quite regularly, that Christians are just as likely to get divorced, as anyone else in the world... But that’s not actually true – it

pretty-much depends on your definition of what “a Christian” is...

- Is a Christian, someone who ticks a box on the census that says “I’m a Christian”?; or
- Is a Christian, a disciple of Jesus, who is seriously **following** Jesus?

Focus on the Family quotes a studyⁱ that says:

- *That 60% of People who identify as being ‘Christian’, but rarely attend church, have been divorced; But*
- *Only 38% of those who do attend church regularly, have been divorced...* (and of course, we know that even regular church attendance doesn’t mean I’m actually a fair-dinkum disciple of Jesus) (Last week, we talked about salt. Salt is known by its taste – unsalty salt, isn’t salt at all.. And Disciples of Jesus, are known by their fruit.)

The biggest cause – the only cause, of failed marriages, is hardness of heart...

In marriage, 2 people join together, and become one flesh... And if one or both of those hearts are hard, how can they possibly meld together into the one flesh relationship that God designed???

And so, Jesus could’ve taught them about divorce, but He didn’t. He taught them about marriage. Because when we understand marriage, and when we understand what Marriage is **really** about, we don’t really need to ask about divorce...

We may come today, with a skewed image, of what Marriage is. The **world** would have us believe that marriage is about “me having my needs met”, and if in my marriage, my needs aren't being met, well it might as well end Oh, but marriage – the theological depth of marriage – I actually find it hard to put it into words... It is so much a mystery, but it's the amazing and beautiful plan of God, that we muddle our way through...

So, what does Jesus teach us about marriage?

1.

Well, God's plan for marriage, is exactly that – a plan – a design... The very act of creation itself, and how God created man, and He created woman – **This**, is the very foundation of marriage...

2.

If I was giving this message 20 or 30 years ago, I wouldn't have to spend much time on this point, because back then it was obvious:

- men married women; and
- women married men...

Men and women are different, you see... We are designed to be different. And it's not just physical differences – we're different...

Men, it is not a defect in your wife, if she

- enjoys handicrafts;
- likes the look of flowery curtains and pink tones in the colour scheme; and
- it's not a defect in her character, if she likes to watch girly movies

Women, it's not a defect in your husband,

- if he enjoys shooting; and
- fishing; and
- doesn't understand the problem of dismantling an engine in the kitchen... It just means he needs a bigger shed...

Ah, you think that's funny... You blokes wait and see how funny it is when your wife starts using your Vernier callipers to tighten a nut on her sewing machine...

We're different; we're **designed** to be different; we're designed to complement each other; We **are** very different, but in our differences, we are designed to be together.....

A man and a woman are designed to come together in a physical union, in a way that a man and a man **or** a woman and a woman, are **not** designed to come together... 20 or 30 years ago, that was obvious... But apparently, it's not so obvious today...

Over the whole same-sex marriage thing, and why the Christian church doesn't support it, I get exceedingly tired of the accusations of intolerance and the accusations of hatefulness and fear... I get tired of the argument that seems to always get made, that Scripture is a product of its time, and

it condemns same-sex relationships because the ancients just didn't know any better.....

What an empty (and extremely shallow) argument that is... Jesus spells out the theology of marriage, and this is what disciples of Jesus base their understanding of marriage on... It's got nothing to do with what's culturally acceptable, or what's **not** culturally acceptable... Jesus was **never** backwards-in-coming-forwards, when it came to being counter to culture... And the Church today, should never be backwards-in-coming-forwards, when it comes to being counter to culture, if that's what it means to honour God...

It's all in God's design: “**from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'**”

This is the pillar, from which Jesus teaches us God's design for marriage...

Since the end of 2017, legally in Australia, a man can marry a man, or a woman can marry a woman... And for Australia, and legally, that's the way it is...

But if truth be told, we do need to understand, that theologically, it's not marriage at all – it's a parody of marriage – it's an imitation, but it's a distorted imitation...

Now, I'm not at all suggesting, that for **most** people who pursue it, they're doing it to mock God... I'm not suggesting that ... The reason most people seek to marry their partner, is they want to have their relationship affirmed in the institution called “Marriage”...

But the problem is, the relationship they want affirmed, is something that God does **not** affirm. He never **has** affirmed it...

If any person chooses to live contrary to God's affirmation, that's between them and God ... If they want to get married in the eyes of the state, fine, but be aware, that it's not marriage by the definition of God...

When Jesus taught about marriage, the pillar – the starting point, is **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,**

3.

The old (rhyming) saying was “leave and cleave”...

I don't like using the word “cleave”. It's a word that has 2 meanings, and they're exact opposites... And so the word “cleave” can mean to split apart, like you're splitting firewood – you cleave it... A cleaver is used for chopping things apart in the kitchen. I've still got my dad's old cleaver that he used to use for cutting the chops every morning...

But as (only I think the English language can do), it also means the opposite. To cleave, means to join together – to glue together... And so the old King James version says:
“For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife”

I think Henry VIII might've got the 2 definitions of "cleave" mixed up... But that's why I don't like to use the word "cleave" – what a strange word – It's its own antonym... (sanction; oversight; left)

Anyway, let's get back on track:

a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast (or be glued to – be joined permanently, such that if you break it apart, it's not the glue that's broken – it causes a fracture, in what has been joined together.) **to his wife,**

And that's the sort of join that's made between a husband and a wife... Some people try to make the join, without leaving their parents (Bad move)...

A man and a woman marry each other – they're not marrying the parents, and you don't bring your parents, or your brothers or sisters, **into** the marriage. ... Yes, when you get married, you inherit the family – you have in-laws... but they don't come **into** your marriage...

*Somebody once told me, that the Bible only says that the **man** has to leave his parents to get married – and that's not the case with the woman – In their view, the woman doesn't have to leave her parents.... Well, sorry: Even though the Scriptures don't explicitly say this, I'm pretty certain that the man leaves his parents **and** the woman leaves her parents...*

And all sorts of troubles can enter a marriage, when either the husband or wife, are still joined to their parents... Where the parents of either the husband or the wife, has influence or

control over one of the partners in this new marriage ,, it's a recipe for disaster...

Husbands and wives, you are one... With the big issues, and the life choices you make – you make sure you discuss them with your husband or your wife... Maybe later on, you might 'bounce ideas' off other people of wisdom, including your parents, but you and your spouse, are one,,, and it spells disaster for a marriage, when either the husband or the wife, have not left their parents...

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. ⁹ What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

4.

What a profound thing – the “one flesh” relationship. Who can understand it?

I have here, a little piece of ply-wood... It's a very strong sort of a material, because the grain of the timber runs in different directions to each-other... The timbers are different, but they're glued together, and they become one... And the 2 different timbers, glued together, are stronger than one timber on its own... And the bond between the two timbers, is so strong, that if I try and prise them apart, it splits and destroys the timber – not the glue...

Also, plywood, is best manufactured from virgin timber... Yes, it would be possible to manufacture plywood from 2nd hand timber, but it would be so inferior, because it's already moulded and cut and shaped, in ways that can't be undone, and so there's limits to how good of a product, the new bond will be...

And the same thing goes for marriage... God's design for marriage, is that before marriage, we shouldn't be joined to anybody else... "Fornication" isn't a word that gets used very much today, and a lot of people wouldn't even know what it means... "Fornication" is having sex before marriage.

And the reason God forbids fornication, isn't because He's a spoil-sport... It's because He knows that when a man and a woman come together physically, they are being joined to one another, and if they split up, a piece of the person fractures with them...

Earlier on, I used the word "mystery" – it's a profound mystery for a man and a woman to become "one flesh", and it's not **just** a sexual thing...

It's a joining together of the person... In the Hebrew, the word was basically, "They become one meat".... I think, what it's getting at, is the marriage relationship is so intimate – the bond is so permanent and binding... The 2 **are** one...

- If you hurt the other, well you mightn't feel like you're hurting yourself, but you're hurting the oneness, that was created in the bond of marriage;
- If you starve the other, you're starving the oneness;

- If you mock the other, you're mocking the unit of oneness;
- If you demean the other, you're demeaning the one flesh;
- If you lie to the other, you're lying to the combined unit;
- If you abuse the other, you're abusing the beautiful unity that God has created....

- But if you honour the other;
- If you bless the other;
- if you value the other,,,
- If you give time to the other,,,

Well, you're not doing it for them, and you're not even doing it for yourself – you're doing it for your union – you're doing it for this one flesh marriage relationship...

The one-flesh relationship, explains how you know what your spouse is feeling, even before you ask them... Sometimes they might try and hide it, and tell you everything's OK, but you know that it's not... You can feel it – you can sense it, because it's not only them who's feeling it – you're feeling it.

The one-flesh relationship, explains how you can just delight in being together in each other's presence, and you mightn't even need to say anything – it's just being together...

But it also explains why to lie to the other, is the ultimate betrayal, because it rips apart the trust...

And it also explains why adultery and divorce, rips the heart out of the individual, like trying to separate plywood...

And so Jesus says:

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

5.

God designed marriage, to be permanent.

Jesus often reserved His toughest teachings, to share privately with His disciples, and when His disciples asked Him to clarify on this issue, He said: **"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."**

That's pretty blunt, isn't it???

- Are you beginning to see, how unique, and how special, the marriage relationship is???
- Are you beginning to see, how critical it is, that we don't just rush in, and marry the wrong person????
- Can you understand why God forbids the policy of 'try-before-you-buy'?
- Can you understand why it's so important, that a Christian shouldn't even consider dating a non-Christian?

I think I might've told you this before:

It must be about 15 years ago, I smashed my ankle... And I eventually had to get it fused...

And the surgeon said to me, "Michael, you have to understand that this is the biggest decision you'll ever make. It means your ankle will never bend again – there's no going back. It's

bigger than deciding what house you're going to buy. It's bigger than choosing a career. It's even bigger than deciding who you're going to marry..."

He was wrong, because he didn't understand God's perspective on marriage.

- *The single most important decision I've ever made, was to say "Yes" to Jesus, and to become His disciple*
- *The second most important decision I've ever made, was to take the hand of Robyn Stehbens, and before our friends and family, and in the presence of God, we became husband and wife. And we will be, until one of us dies...*

That, is God's design for marriage. And if husband and wife together, are not hard-hearted, the one-flesh relationship can work. And it is a beautiful, beautiful thing...

The trouble is, our hardness of heart... Now, I'm pretty sure that none of us here, have the perfect marriage... And where there **are** flaws in marriage, we can put it all down to hardness of heart...

- *What causes a man, to commit adultery? Hardness of heart;*
- *Nag*
- *Demean*
- *Flirt with other men*
- *Run his wife down to others*
- *Dishonour*

You get the picture.

And I can say, without any doubt, that God's desire, is for us to continue in our marriages, and for us to soften our hearts... God doesn't magically fix our marriages (like some of us would hope), but if we hand ourselves over to Him – if we soften our hearts, He is in the business of changing our hearts...

Now having said that, I did say earlier, that it appears, that in some cases, God does allow divorce... **But**, it seems that Mark 10 disagrees with that...

And some people will look at Mark 10, and have the attitude of a lawyer (or maybe the attitude of a judge) – “There's the legislation – it's black-&-white”... No divorce – no getting married again after divorce...

But we **do** need to keep in mind, that the Gospel of Mark, is the shortest of all the gospels... Jesus didn't go into all of the circumstances... In other passages, there are 2 exceptions, to when divorce is allowable... We don't have time to go into that now, but I **have** already preached on those passages before...

- Matthew 19
- 1 Corinthians 7

And something else we need to keep in mind, is:
Divorce is not the unforgivable sin. There is life after divorce...

I'm very aware that today I'm speaking to people of all sorts of different backgrounds; histories; and current circumstances:

- Some of you are single;
- Some of us are married;
- Some are divorced;
- Some have been divorced, and are now married to another;
- Some may be struggling with their sexuality, and what the world is telling you, might be very different to what you've heard today;
- Some may be in a marriage, where the hardness of heart, is tearing one or both of them apart – but it's certainly tearing the one-flesh relationship apart...

God's message to all of us today, is honour God today; honour God tomorrow; and honour God for the rest of your life...

When we repent, God forgives us for the mess that we've made in the past... But He wants us to honour Him from here-on-in... Let's work toward strong marriages, with 2 softened hearts being one flesh.

Let's pray,
Heavenly Father, I want to pray today,
for those who are listening to this, who are married.
Lord, I want to thank You for the gift of marriage
– for Your wonderful design of marriage;
and for the blessing that it is, to be married...
How wonderful it is,
that You would take 2 separate people,

and join them together, to become one.

And Yet Lord, we acknowledge,
that for our part, we've failed...

In many ways we fail...

Our hearts have been hard...

Lord, I pray, that You would soften the hearts,
of every person here,
and that You would heal the wounds that exist in our
marriages.

Lord, I pray for those who are single:

If it is Your will for them to marry,
guide them to the one You've chosen for them.

Give our young men wisdom

to seek a young woman of God;

And give our young women wisdom,

to seek a young man of God –

a man who has such a strong faith,

that He would be a spiritual leader in their family...

And Lord,

we ask that You would give them patience to wait...

Gracious Jesus,

we pray for those who have had the heartache
of broken marriage and divorce...

Lord,

may they experience Your grace and Your renewal,
as You set them free from the brokenness of the past,
and as they enter Your wonderful, life-giving future,
in the Name of Jesus.

And Lord, we look forward with anticipation,
For the final marriage – for the royal wedding;

When Jesus Christ returns,
To be joined together with His church...
That we, become one with our Lord..

Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/about/focus-findings/marriage/divorce-rate-in-the-church-as-high-as-the-world> Bradley R.E. Wright, *Christians Are Hate-Filled Hypocrites ... and Other Lies You've Been Told*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2010), p. 133.