

**Introduction**

1. Jim and Beatrice Jones marked their 70<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary yesterday (11/16/21).
  - a. They have been married nine years longer than I have been alive!
  - b. We have several couples in our church who have been married 50+ years.
  - c. I say, "A-men." What an example they are to the rest of us who are married.
2. God intends marriage to be a covenant relationship between one man and one woman for a lifetime.
  - a. We know that a sad reality of life is that at least half of all marriages end in divorce.
  - b. In today's society, a divorce can be obtained at the request of either the husband or the wife.
3. What did Jesus have to say about divorce, and how can we apply His words today?
4. **Read Mk 10:1-12.**

**A. The Final Journey to Jerusalem (1)**

1. According to Mk 9:33, Jesus and His disciples had most recently been in Capernaum, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.
2. Mk 10:1 records "Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan."
  - a. Jesus and His disciples moved from Galilee to the east bank of the Jordan, the region known as Perea, as they headed south toward Jerusalem.
  - b. This route through the was longer but avoided going through Samaria.
3. Lk 9:51-56 records an incident not found in Mark that may explain Jesus' deviation around Samaria. "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them. Then he and his disciples went to another village."
4. Jesus had begun His final journey to Jerusalem that would end with His crucifixion and resurrection just as He had already predicted on two occasions (cf., Mk 8:31, 9:31-32).
5. As they travelled, Jesus taught the disciples and others who followed or whom they encountered, such as a group of Pharisees with a question for Jesus.

**B. The Pharisees Test Jesus (2-9)**

1. The Pharisees Set a Trap (2)
  - a. The Pharisees asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce (Gk. *apoluo* – "send away") his wife?" (2)
  - b. They were not as interested in hearing an answer to their question as they were in Jesus' response.
  - c. They hoped that Jesus would say something that either violated the Law or that raised the ire of those who followed him or the political powers in Perea.
    - 1) John the Baptist had been beheaded for confronting Herod Antipas about his divorce. Jesus was now in the region of Perea, which was controlled by Herod Antipas. His life could literally be forfeit if the wrong answer came to Herod's attention.
    - 2) Divorce was common in Jesus' day but was not the same as divorce in our day.
      - a) Today, divorce is a court approved dissolution of a marriage initiated by either partner or both.
      - b) In Jesus' day, divorce was seen as the right of a Jewish man, not a woman, to make a unilateral declaration of divorce against which there was no appeal.
  - d. This tricky question tactic was one that the Jewish leaders (i.e., Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, and teachers of the law) employed on many occasions (cf. Mk 2:18, 2:24, 8:11, 11:28, 12:13-15, 12:18-23, 12:28, 14:60-64) as they sought to entrap, discredit, and ultimately kill Jesus.

## 2. Jesus Answered Well (3-5)

a. Jesus answered their question with a question, “What did Moses command you?”

b. The Pharisees knew the answer, but Jesus answered his own question anyway by saying, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”

1) Here is what Moses said about divorce as recorded in Dt 24:1-4.

“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, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, 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, 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 the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.”

2) Warren Wiersbe comments, “. . . the official ‘bill of divorcement’ was given to the wife to declare her status and to assure any prospective husband that she was indeed free to remarry. Apart from the giving of this document, the only other requirement was that the woman not return to her first husband if her second husband divorced her. Among the Jews, the question was not, ‘May a divorced woman marry again?’ because remarriage was permitted and even expected. The big question was, ‘What are the legal grounds for a man to divorce his wife?’” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 118).

3) Dt 24:1-4 does not condone divorce but makes provision for what is to be done and not done when it occurs in human relationships.

4) Divorce was an allowance by man (i.e., Moses) due to the hard hearts (Gk. *sklerokardia*) of God’s people who are stubborn, sinful, and selfish.

5) Divorce was a concession of human law but did not represent God’s ideal.

c. Permissible grounds for divorce were debated by Jewish rabbis in Jesus’ day.

1) The school of Rabbi Shammai allowed for divorce but restricted “something indecent” (Dt 24:1) to sexual unfaithfulness on the part of the wife.

2) The school of Rabbi Hillel interpreted “something indecent” as almost anything, even burning dinner. This was the more popular view in Jesus’ day.

3) No court decision was required to obtain a divorce only a unilateral action by the husband.

4) Divorce in Jesus’ day was not unlike our own day in that it was relatively easy to obtain, frequent in occurrence, and resulted in a lax attitude toward the covenant of marriage.

## 3. Jesus went past the law of man to the heart of the matter (6-9).

a. Jesus said, “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh.” (6-8)

1) Jesus first noted that God created humans as either male or female (cf., Ge 1:27).

2) As males and females, God ordained that a man, the male, unite with his wife, the female (cf., Ge 2:24).

3) Marriage is a God-ordained covenant relationship.

b. The marriage relationship is to be a “one flesh” (Gk., *sarka mian*) relationship. What is a “one flesh” relationship?

1) It is the union of the husband and wife in physical, spiritual, emotional, mental bond.

2) Husband and wife unite physically in work and sex, spiritually in their worship of and service to God, emotionally in support to one another, and mentally in their thinking and planning for life.

3) All aspects of this “one flesh” relationship need care and attention by both husband and wife.

4) The most beautiful picture of a “one flesh” relationship is that found in Ephesians 5:21-33.

a) **Read Eph 5:21-33.**

b) The relationship of Christ with the church is “one flesh” as we are members of His body.

c) The relationship is based on mutual submission and self-sacrificial love.

c. Jesus concluded, “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (9)

1) God’s ideal is that once the marriage bond is made, it will only be dissolved by the death of either the husband or the wife.

2) No one, including the husband or the wife, should seek to dissolve this covenant relationship.

4. Why are Jesus' words so strong about divorce?
  - a. Marriage is a sacred covenant between one man and one woman for a lifetime.
  - b. God hates covenant breaking of all types.
 

“For I hate putting away (KJV) divorce (NASB)” (Mal 2:16a).
  - c. Divorce is a heart problem.
    - 1) Sometimes the hearts of either the husband or the wife or both become so hardened that they are no longer sensitive to God's ideal for the covenant of marriage.
    - 2) There may be many reasons for divorce, some of them even good by our world's standards, but in the end all divorce is covenant breaking which is not God's ideal but sin.
    - 3) Divorce is not commanded by God but allowed due to the sinful, hard hearts of human beings.
    - 4) Divorce is the undoing of the work and will of God in the lives of a man and a woman.
    - 5) Divorce is an accommodation of the ideal will of God due to the harsh realities of life in this fallen world.
  - d. As always, there is great tension between God's ideal for our lives and our human realities.

### C. The Disciples Have a Further Question (10-12)

1. After the encounter with the Pharisees, Jesus and the disciples retired to a home. (10)
  - a. The disciples had a further question which is not directly stated in the text.
  - b. Based on Jesus' answer, their question appears to be related to remarriage after divorce, which was also a common practice in Jesus' day.
2. “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her” (11)
  - a. What does Jesus' statement mean for a husband who divorces his wife and remarries?
  - b. Adultery (Gk., *moichatai*) is committed when either the husband or wife has sexual relations outside the one flesh relationship of marriage. Adultery is prohibited by the 7<sup>th</sup> of the Ten Commandments (cf., Ex 21) and is punishable by stoning (cf., Lv 20:10).
  - c. The divorced man who remarries commits adultery by engaging in sexual relations with his new wife.
  - d. “against her” – Against whom is the adultery committed?
    - 1) It is committed against the wife of the first marriage.
    - 2) The covenant of marriage with the first wife is broken by the one flesh union with another wife.
3. “And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.” (12)
  - a. What does Jesus' statement mean for a wife who divorces her husband and remarries?
  - b. Women were not allowed under Jewish law to initiate a divorce.
    - 1) Jesus' declaration elevates women to the same position as men, facing the same consequences.
    - 2) The same consequences apply to the remarried wife as the remarried husband.
  - c. If the divorced wife remarries, she also commits adultery against her first husband.
4. So, is there any possibility of remarriage after divorce?
  - a. In Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, He added to what he said in Mark 10:11-12.
  - b. “But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Mt 5:32, underlining mine).
    - 1) Jesus' focus was not on allowing divorce and remarriage but on its seriousness.
    - 2) Jesus' words imply that it was expected that a divorced woman would remarry as her best means of survival. The blame for her predicament is put on the husband who unilaterally initiated the divorce.
    - 3) Remarriage was especially important for a woman, as she relied on her husband for support. Her options after divorce were:
      - a) Return to her father's house and be under his protection.
      - b) Remarry.
      - c) Live with a man but not in the covenant of marriage (e.g., the Samaritan woman cf. Jn 4:18).
      - d) Become a prostitute to support herself (e.g., perhaps the woman in Lk 7:36-39).
  - c. The allowable exception Jesus made for remarriage without adultery is in the case of sexual unfaithfulness by the wife or by implication the husband. By violation of the one flesh relationship, the marriage covenant has already been broken prior to the divorce.

- d. Concerning the meaning and application of this difficult teaching, Daniel Akin insightfully writes, “Dogmatism and certainty are not appropriate in an area where good and godly students who affirm the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible hold differing views. . . . Our goal must be to be biblical and not emotional. We should also emphasize prevention and not be reactionary. The latter is difficult, especially for those who have experienced the pain of divorce in some way” (Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 208, 206).

**D. Reflections** – How must we apply Jesus’ words to our marriage relationships today?

1. God’s ideal is that the covenant of marriage between a husband and wife will last for a lifetime.
  - a. Marriage is more than a relationship recognized by the laws of humankind. Marriage is a covenant relationship ordained by God from the beginning.
  - b. God’s will is for faithful, unbroken marriage “until death us do part.”
  - c. Divorce is never God’s ideal, but it happens.
  - d. In marriage forgiveness and reconciliation are best, but in this world that is not always possible.
2. We must honor the covenant of marriage by living in the “one flesh” relationship God intended and modelled in Christ’s relationship with the church in Ephesians 5:21-33.
3. We must take care not to interpret scripture legalistically by condemning all who are divorced.
  - a. Each of us has missed the mark of God’s ideal in life in many ways.
  - b. Divorce is a more public failure/sin than others we may commit.
  - c. As always, God’s heart is filled not with condemnation but with grace and redemption.
4. Here are five ways that we can apply Jesus’ words today:
  - a. If you are not yet married but thinking about it, realize the serious commitment you will make to the other person before God. Build a covenant marriage that you both will work not only to keep but to improve over a lifetime.
  - b. If you are married, stay married and work hard to improve your marriage.
    - 1) It is possible to be legally married but functionally divorced. Don’t let this happen in your marriage.
    - 2) Do the hard work required to stay married in spite of the stresses and strains on the relationship.
    - 3) One should never submit to physical/emotional/mental abuse by a spouse.
    - 4) Seek counseling together or individually if the other party will not go.
  - c. If you are thinking about divorce, don’t do it. Exhaust all options to forgive and reconcile.
  - d. If you are divorced, recognize that divorce is not God’s ideal, but He can and will forgive you as you repent and turn to Him.
    - 1) The reality is that all marriages will not survive.
    - 2) We are each responsible for our actions in the marriage relationship not the actions of the other.
    - 3) We must do our part to make the marriage work.
    - 4) If the marriage fails, we must acknowledge our part in the sin and confess it to God and the other party as we seek forgiveness from both.
  - e. If you are divorced and are considering remarriage or are already remarried, recognize that a second marriage is not God’s ideal, but God calls you to covenant faithfulness in a one flesh relationship in the second marriage.
    - 1) If the other party is unfaithful or initiates the legal divorce without your agreement, there may be an option for remarriage.
    - 2) The options for those contemplating divorce are:
      - a) Do not divorce but live separately without another partner—This does not honor the “one flesh” covenant but avoids the possibility of committing adultery.
      - b) Divorce but do not remarry—This still does not honor the “one flesh” covenant but avoids the possibility of committing adultery.
      - c) Divorce and remarry—This still does not honor the “one flesh” covenant made in the first marriage and opens the possibility of committing adultery in the second marriage.  
Statistically about 75% or all second marriages also fail and the percentage of failure goes higher with each subsequent remarriage.
5. Ultimately, remember God’s forgiveness and help are always available to all who sin when they repent of sin and call on Him from the heart.