

Marriage, Divorce, and the Glory of God (Part 3)

Mark 10:1-12

REVIEW

Four Foundational Cornerstones for Cornerstone

1. Jesus contributes to our knowledge of appreciation of God's glory in all He teaches
2. Jesus consistently engages His mission through teaching.
3. Jesus clarifies God's word for those who will listen.
4. Jesus connects His disciples with God's truth: "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free."

SET THE STAGE

Jesus on the Way

Jesus, on the way to Jerusalem and to the cross, continues His custom of teaching. Pharisees join the crowd and pose a question that is meant to trap Jesus in His word and turn the crowd against Him. They question the common practice of divorce, asking whether it is lawful or not, asking whether divorce is of God and an expression of His will. The essence of Jesus' answer affirms that the lifelong, covenant commitment of one man and one woman is God's will from the moment of creation, and that divorce is a response to human sinful, obstinance, not to the will of God.

The Pharisees disappear from the scene. Jesus took them from a worldly, fleshly consideration of an important topic straight to the mind and heart of God Himself on the matter, and apparently, there was nothing left for them to say.

Jesus in the House

The story moves from this public event, out in the streets, to a house where Jesus and His disciples are staying. In the house, away from public ears, they ask Jesus again about the earlier discussion. Matthew, recording the same occasion, reveals that the disciples are a bit frustrated.

They are so appalled at Jesus uncompromising stand on marriage and divorce and remarriage, they throw up their hands and throw an extreme statement exactly the opposite of what Jesus has just told them. Jesus took them to Genesis and reminded them that marriage, not divorce, was God's will for humanity at creation. The disciples are so exasperated that Jesus teaches divorce is not part of God's will they say, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it I better not marry."

This statement is both ridiculous and pathetic, worthy of pity. Hear what the disciples are saying, "Jesus, if marriage doesn't come with an inherent privilege of divorce for men, then we shouldn't marry." They're saying, if God wasn't going to allow divorce, he should never have created marriage in the first place. They're saying that if a man can't marry a wife knowing he can trade her in for a new one any time he wants, he might as well not marry. They are saying that any marriage is only as good as the potential for divorce. They are really frustrated with Jesus' counter-cultural teaching.

Frustration Motivates Exploration When You Trust Your Teacher!

Their frustration makes sense of what Mark says about their question. Mark 10:10 says they “asked him again about the matter.” That word “asked” is a verb. In English it is translated in the past tense, as it looks like they sat down to dinner and one of the guys raised the issue again over mutton steaks and matzah balls. In Greek, however, that word “asked” is in the imperfect form. It signifies an incomplete action in the past. We could translate that word as “the disciples peppered Jesus with questions, and they wouldn’t stop.”

We don’t get the sense that they were grilling Jesus, interrogating him like the Pharisees. We get the sense that Jesus has deeply challenged their social thinking about God and the real world and they desperately want to understand what He means. They’ve never heard this teaching before. It is not what they grew up with, not what they have observed, not what they have experienced. This is foreign to them and they are doing the one thing they know they can do with Jesus.

They are exploring and investigating God’s truth. They can’t get enough. They understand how important this is and they want to know what they need to know. Instead of rebellion, their frustration leads them to search out the truth. That’s what makes them disciples of Jesus. That should be what makes all of us disciples of Jesus. We will sometimes be frustrated with God’s self-revelation, but let that frustration motivate us to study more deeply, ask harder questions, learn the truth for ourselves. That’s what disciples do. They trust the teacher to tell them the truth and they ask questions.

THE POINT: JESUS CONNECTS HIS DISCIPLES WITH GOD’S TRUTH

The Fourth Cornerstone for Cornerstone

Jesus’ responds by connecting His disciples with God’s truth. This is the fourth cornerstone for Cornerstone in the passage. Jesus gives them the guiding principle from the word of God. The commandment, the article of covenant law that relates to marriage and divorce, is one of the ten commandments. It is the seventh commandment, “You shall not commit adultery.”

Adultery, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

Adultery vs Fornication

Adultery is any sexual intimacy a married person has with someone who is not their spouse. When Jesus says, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery,” he reveals that from God’s perspective, divorce does not dissolve marriage.

Adultery is unlawful, God rejected sex between married people. Fornication, a completely different word, is unlawful sex between unmarried people. All these people living together and having sex outside of marriage are fornicators in the eyes of God. Their sin is sex outside of the covenant commitment of marriage. Married people who have sex with anyone other than their original, covenant partner to whom they made a lifelong commitment before God, commit

adultery. Jesus does not say that remarriage creates fornicators. He states that remarriage after divorce creates adulterers. Adultery breaks God's covenant law.

Side Note: No Exception Clause

This is also an important reason to reject the interpretation that Matthew 19 contains an "exception" clause. Many, many interpreters teach that Jesus allows divorce on the basis of marital unfaithfulness. I don't think so, and one reason I think Jesus makes no such allowance, is because I don't think Jesus used words carelessly. In Matthew 19: 9 Jesus says,

Matthew 19:9 (ESV) *And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.*

The word Jesus uses that is translated "sexual immorality" is the Greek word that means "fornication," which we already said is unlawful sex between unmarried people. Jesus does not use the Greek word here for "adultery," which he uncompromisingly uses in Mark 10 and at the end of Matthew 19:9. Here's what I think is going on. In Jesus' day, marriage in Israel was a two-step process.

Remember Mary and Joseph? Joseph found out Mary was pregnant and was going to divorce her privately on the basis of "fornication." The first step of Jewish marriage was the signing of a legal commitment. The second step was the spiritual and physical union. Once the papers were signed, a couple were considered "married" even though the marriage would not be consummated until after the second ceremony. If either of them were involved in a sexual encounter with someone other than their betrothed, the sin would rightly be called fornication and the response could, if the injured party decided, sever the legal relationship and not proceed with the spiritual ceremony and the physical union.

Only because no physical union had proceeded between the couple and before God could a divorce take place without the sin of adultery. Every divorce after the couple entered their covenant commitment and consummated their vows with a physical union, when there was a subsequent remarriage, resulted in the sin of adultery, a married person having sex outside their original marriage covenant. Joseph could consider a divorce from Mary because they had not come together yet. She, in that scenario, would have been guilty of fornication and he would not have been guilty of adultery if he married someone else.

And I think the reason Matthew records this event in this manner and Mark doesn't is because Matthew is writing to a predominantly Jewish audience who will want to resolve the tension as to why Jesus is not the illegitimate son of a sinful woman.

Back to Mark 10: Four Connections That Change Everything

Jesus connects His disciples with God's truth. But, to fully understand and appreciate what Jesus does here in this teaching, we need to embrace four connections that Jesus makes for us, four connections that change everything. When Jesus connects His disciples to the commandment, He connects us to the purpose for which God saves us; He connects us to the condition from which God saves us; He connects us to the means by which God saves us; and He connects us to the outcome to which God saves us. Let's take a look at each of these connections one at a time.

Connection #1

1. When Jesus connects His disciples to the commandment, He connects us to the purpose for which God saves us:
 - a. Have we lost sight of the purpose for which God sent His Son as an expression of love to reveal His grace and pour out His mercy?
 - b. God requires that we be holy
 - i. **Leviticus 20:7 (ESV)** ⁷ *Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God.*
 - ii. **Leviticus 20:26 (ESV)** ²⁶ *You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.*
 - c. In between these two verses are a series of prohibitions relative to sexual intimacy.
 - i. The purpose of God's Law is to describe in relatable terms God's personal holiness
 - ii. And to reestablish in our thinking what it means to bear the image of God in the world i.e., to be holy for the Lord our God is holy.
 - d. Jesus connects His disciples with the truth of God because God's truth reveals the purpose of God for which we are created and saved from sin, that we might be like Him in the world, bearing His image, being holy.
 - e. One aspect of God's holiness, His holy character, is His faithfulness to the covenant He makes with His people
 - i. Covenant faithfulness meant little to the people of the ancient world, just as means little to the people of our world today.
 - ii. Selfishness and the pursuit of self-interest ruled in the human heart then just as it does now
 - iii. But look, it was for this very selfishness that God destroyed them.
 - (1) **Leviticus 20:23 (ESV)** ²³ *And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them.*
 - (2) The customs of the nations were the prohibitions mentioned previously in the chapter including:
 - (a) Adultery
 - (b) Incest
 - (c) Homosexuality
 - (d) Polyamory
 - (e) Bestiality
 - iv. God labels common social, relational, sexual practices of other cultures sin and excludes those behaviors from His people and His covenant so that His people will be holy, they will be like Him in the world, and the people of the world, who see the difference, will know God as He truly is.
 - (1) There are people in the world, people in whom the Holy Spirit is working, who don't want to know God as sinful people imagine Him

- (2) Their hearts long to know God as He really is, and folks, the church is the signpost in the world to the one true God
 - (3) God's calls to holiness, to living lives separate from the world and different than the world is means by which the elect in the world can find their way home.
 - (4) Don't hide the light by looking so much like the world the image of God is lost in your life.
- f. Jesus connects His disciples to the commandment in order to connect us to the purpose for which God saves us, that we might be holy and put God's own character on display in the world so the world can know Him as He actually is.
- i. God is not merely applying the divine privilege of human behavioral modification.
 - ii. God is mercifully reaching out to a lost world with the life-changing, soul-saving truth about Himself.

Connection #2

2. When Jesus connects His disciples to the commandment, He connects us to the condition from which God saves us:
- a. The condition from which God saves us sin.
 - b. Sin is revealed to us through the Law
 - i. **Romans 7:7 (ESV) ⁷ What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."**
 - ii. By establishing right and wrong for us in His word, we come to know what is of God in our lives and in the world and what defies or denies God.
 - c. In Jesus' time, it was not considered wrong for a man to divorce His wife.
 - i. It was wrong for a woman to attempt to divorce her husband, but divorce was considered an acceptable male privilege.
 - ii. That means, because of how the people had abandon God's creation purpose for marriage and instituted their own standards, they felt no guilt because they did not consider themselves to be committing adultery, even though, in God's eyes, that is exactly what they were doing.
 - iii. Jesus' teaching, that anyone who divorces their wife and married another commits adultery,
 - (1) reestablishes God's truth,
 - (2) reveals the true nature of their sin,
 - (3) and uncovers the burden of guilt the people are witlessly amassing for themselves
 - d. God's Law leads to an understanding of sin and guilt, but what good is that?

Connection #3

3. When Jesus connects His disciples to the commandment, He connects us to the means by

which God saves us: Christ Himself

- a. **Galatians 3:23–24 (ESV)** ²³ *Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.* ²⁴ *So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.*
 - i. The law, by revealing our sin and guilt, also reveals our need for a remedy for that sin and guilt.
 - ii. The Law also demonstrates our inability to save ourselves, for the Law demands perfect obedience, and to break any of the Law is to break all the Law.
- b. When Jesus connects His disciples to the commandment, He connects us to our need for a Savior, and He is that Savior.
 - i. Jesus, without sin in life, perfectly adheres to the Law of God
 - ii. Jesus, innocent of sin and guilt offers Himself to death on the cross, in our place on our behalf.
 - iii. **Galatians 3:13 (ESV)** ¹³ *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—*
- c. When Jesus connects His disciples to the commandment, He connects us to the means by which God saves us: Christ Himself.

Connection #4

4. When Jesus connects His disciples to the commandment, He connects us to the outcome to which God saves us: “such were some of you, but now . . . “
 - a. **1 Corinthians 6:9–11 (ESV)** ⁹ *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*
 - b. It doesn't matter what label you put on it, we are all sinners, excluded from the kingdom of God until God pours out His sovereign grace and mercy, gives us faith, and enables us to trust Him to forgive our sins through faith in Christ.
 - i. “Idolaters” covers everyone.
 - ii. Idolaters are anyone who loves something in this world more than they love God
 - c. **But once God brings us to faith, everything changes!**
 - i. Such WERE some of you
 - ii. That's what you were before faith, before Christ, before mercy, before the gospel, BUT NOW
 - (1) You are washed - your guilt is removed
 - (2) You were sanctified - (set apart, made holy)
 - (3) You were justified - (set free from an expectation of condemnation)

and punishment on account of sin and guilt and assigned a label of “righteous in Christ,” through faith in Him!)

iii. When we come to faith in Christ and count Him our Savior and surrender our lives to Him in devotion and obedience, we become, through Him and the work of the Holy Spirit a new creation.

(1) **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)** *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

(2) We ain't what we was and we are becoming new!

(3) We bear a new name, a new purpose, and a new label:

(a) Once we were the worst kind of sinner

(b) Now we are saints, adopted children of God, slaves of Christ Jesus.

d. When Jesus connects His disciples with the commandment, He connects us to the outcome of God's grace: new life in Christ through faith

CONCLUSION

How do we receive this word today? Some see themselves in the law, if not the seventh commandment, then certainly the first: Thou shalt have no other gods before me. We may see ourselves only as sinners, condemned under the Law, but I urge you, if you have put your faith in Jesus Christ, see not what you were, but what you are:

1. **Romans 5:1–2 (ESV)** *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

2. **Romans 8:1–4 (ESV)** *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

3. **Galatians 5:1 (ESV)** *For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*