

### 34. Jesus Taught About Divorce

In our last topic, we saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children how to be like salt in the world and how to have peace with others. In this topic, we are going to see that Jesus taught the Pharisees, and the rest of the people, about the difference between permitting divorce and commanding divorce.

Jesus had been teaching in the region of Galilee. As we begin Mark 10, we see that Jesus went to one of the areas of Judea. Mark 10:1-2 says, “Then He arose from there and came to the region of Judea by the other side of the Jordan. And multitudes gathered to Him again, and as He was accustomed, He taught them again. The Pharisees came and asked Him, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce *his* wife?’ testing Him.” Galilee was the northern area of Israel, while Judea was the southern area of Israel. In between was the area of Samaria. Here, we see that one area of Judea was the area on the other side of the Jordan. That area was known as Perea. Jesus taught in this area of Judea until it was time for Him to go to Jerusalem to be crucified.

The people, throughout the region of Judea, heard that Jesus was nearby, so multitudes of people came to Perea to see Jesus. We see that Jesus did what He was accustomed to do when the multitudes came to Him. Jesus began to teach the people again. Here, we see an important lesson about the ministry of Jesus. Jesus made it a habit to teach the people when they came to Him. This is one of the things that we, as Christians, should also learn to make a part of our lives. When people come to us with questions, 1 Peter 3:15-16 says, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.” Here, we see that we are to be ready to give an answer, even to those who are trying to tear down our reputation and make fun.

However, we are not to try to give our own opinions. Instead, we are to share the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” As we share the Word of God, Ephesians 4:15 says, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—.” By sharing the Word of God, we know that we are sharing the truth. By speaking the Word with love, the Lord can speak through His Word and discern the thoughts and intents of the hearts as we teach the Word of God to others.

We see that some of the Pharisees came to the area of Perea to hear Jesus teach. However, they had a different purpose than the rest of the multitude. They came to ask questions, but not to learn. Instead, they came to ask questions to test Jesus and try to trap Him by the words He spoke. As a result, they began by asking the question, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce *his* wife?” At that time, the Jews were very divided by the question of divorce. Some felt that divorce was allowed for any and every reason. Others thought that divorce was only allowed when a person had committed adultery. The Pharisees knew that, in this large crowd, part of the people held one view while part of the people held the other view. They felt that whichever way Jesus answered, His

answer would turn part of the people against Him.

We read what Jesus did, in Mark 10:3-9. Those verses say, “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 to dismiss *her*.’ And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation, God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” Instead of answering their question, Jesus asked them what Moses had written in the books of the Law.

The Pharisees answered by saying part of what Moses had said in Deuteronomy 24:1. “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts *it* in her hand, and sends her out of his house.” The word translated “uncleanness” is used fifty-four times in the Old Testament and is translated “nakedness” fifty-one of those times. This is the only place the word is translated “uncleanness”. The word is used three times in Genesis 9:22-23, where we read, “And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid *it* on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces *were* turned away, and they did not see their father’s nakedness.” Then, the word is used twenty-four times in Leviticus 18, where it is used to describe various kinds of sexual sin. As a result, the verse the Pharisees quoted showed that divorce was allowed because of various forms of sexual sin.

Jesus pointed out that the reason divorce was allowed was because of the hardness of the hearts of people. However, the passage never required, encouraged, or even suggested divorce. That passage gave instructions that the person could not marry someone else and then return to the original partner, because that would be an abomination before the Lord. Then, Jesus quoted the passage written by Moses, in Genesis 2:24, which says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” This is the command that Moses wrote about marriage and is the foundation for all marriages.

In this command, we see that a man is to leave his father and mother. This command was given to Adam and Eve who had no father or mother. This shows that God was giving a principle for all future marriages, because it could not apply to the marriage of Adam and Eve. Many divorces happen because of the hardness of the hearts of people. That is why Malachi 2:16 says, “For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence,” says the LORD of hosts. “Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.” In Malachi 2, God spoke to Israel about the way Israel had profaned the family. In Malachi 2:15, God explains why He made the two one. That verse says, “But did He not make *them* one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.” Here, we see that God wants a couple to become one, because God seeks godly children. That happens best in a home where the parents provide a godly example by their marriage and lives.

Jesus certainly shows His love and mercy to those who have been divorced. In Luke 5:29-32, we read, “Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, ‘Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance.’” Jesus also chose to reach out to an entire town through the Samaritan woman, even though Jesus said, in John 4:17-18, “The woman answered and said, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You have well said, “I have no husband,” for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.’” Even though Jesus knew the past of this woman, He chose to begin and end this statement to the woman by complimenting her for telling the truth. Then, He reached out to the whole town through her introduction of Him.

A Christian is given three situations in which remarriage is allowed. Romans 7:2 says, “For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to *her* husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of *her* husband.” A widow or widower is free to remarry. Matthew 5:32 says, “But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.” Jesus included the exception clause here, and in Matthew 19:9, about a partner who continues to commit immorality and divorces their partner. This frees the partner, just as death frees (in the law those guilty of adultery were stoned to death – Leviticus 20:10). 1 Corinthians 7:15 says, “But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such *cases*. But God has called us to peace.” Here, we see that an unbelieving partner who refuses to continue living with a Christian, and gets a divorce, frees the Christian from bondage and allows for remarriage.

Christ was later asked a further question by His disciples. Mark 10:10-12 says, “In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same *matter*. So He said to them, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.’” In this answer, we see that Jesus said that if either a man or a woman got a divorce in order to marry another, the person getting the divorce is guilty of adultery. This is an illustration of the hardness of heart mentioned in Deuteronomy 24, which is a sin that causes other sins. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand what Jesus taught about marriage so they will be able to teach others. We also want to help them learn how to help others have their hearts transformed by Christ, as they learn to yield to the Lord moment-by-moment. May the Lord richly bless you as you help others develop godly marriages.