



Gospel of Mark Sermon Series – Mark 10:1-12

“Balancing Divorce with Grace and Truth”

Study Notes

1. A few important preliminary considerations.

a) **Jesus said that the only unforgivable sin was “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” – Mark 3:28-29**

²⁸ I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. ²⁹ But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin."

In this context Jesus is referring to the Pharisees’ accusation that Jesus was possessed by Satan rather than the Spirit of God, and thus they concluded he could not be the true Messiah. Therefore, “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” involves a rejection of Holy Spirit’s testimony about Jesus as God in the flesh, attributing his power to the works of the devil. In short: this blasphemy is a rejection of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. There will be no forgiveness for those who refuse to believe in Him in this life.

Therefore, for our purposes, divorce is most certainly a forgivable sin, though there are consequences from the sin that may last a lifetime.

b) **God ordained marriage from the beginning of creation. It is defined as a life-long covenant relationship between one man and one woman who have been legally joined together, and it is the foundation of society. (Gen. 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9; Romans 7:2)**

According to Genesis 2:24, it involves leaving one’s family to permanently establish a new family that is recognized as a covenant union of body and soul into “one flesh.”

^{GE 2:24} **For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.**

c) **Scripture portrays marriage as a blessing from God.**

^{PR 18:22} **He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD.**

See also Proverbs 31:10-12, 1 Timothy 4:1-5

Note: Since God created and instituted marriage, human beings do not have the right to set it aside and redefine it in unbiblical terms.

d) Jesus and Paul both emphasized the permanency of marriage in this life in their teaching.

MATT 19:6 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Jesus)

ROM 7:2 For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. (Paul)

Opening Summary Conclusions:

**The only unforgivable sin is rejection of Christ
God has ordained marriage as the foundation of society since creation.
Scripture portrays marriage as a blessing from God.
By God's design, marriage is to be permanent.**

2. Divorce is a breaking of the covenant union that God has joined together, and is therefore dishonoring to God.

a) Note God's attitude toward divorce.

MAL 2:13 Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. ¹⁴ You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

MAL 2:15 Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

MAL 2:16 "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

From this we conclude that divorce "involves unfaithfulness to the solemn covenant of marriage that two partners have entered into before Him, and...brings harmful consequences to those partners and their children."¹

b) Divorce was never a part of God's original plan for marriage.

MT 19:8 Jesus replied,..."it was not this way from the beginning."

¹ Taken from http://www.gracechurch.org/home/doclib.asp?ministry_id=1&dlcat=Distinctives. This is an elder statement on divorce and remarriage from Dr. John MacArthur's church in Sun Valley, California.

TWO EXCEPTIONS

3. However, though marriage should be permanent, and divorce is regarded as dishonoring to God, the Bible does *permit* or *allow* divorce under certain prescribed circumstances – **marital unfaithfulness** or **desertion by an unbelieving spouse**.

a) **MARITAL UNFAITHFULNESS:**

The exception clause of Matthew 19 (the teaching of Jesus)²

MT 19:3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"³

MT 19:4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator `made them male and female,'⁵ and said, `For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' ?⁶ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

MT 19:7 "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

MT 19:8 Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.⁹ I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

“Marital unfaithfulness” (sexual immorality) is the English translation of the word *porneia*. It is a broad term that encompasses sexual sin of all kinds, especially incest, homosexuality, fornication, and adultery.

Therefore, if such a sin occurs, and **reconciliation is not possible**, then **Jesus permits the faithful partner to be released from the bond of marriage through divorce**.

Grammatically, the exception clause applies to the phrase before it (divorce) and the phrase behind it (remarriage), and so in this specific situation the innocent party is permitted to divorce and remarry.

In this situation, the innocent party is not sinning by experiencing a divorce, and neither are they sinning, if, after being unable to reconcile, they choose to get remarried, but the remarriage must be to another believer (see. 1 Cor. 7:39).

Therefore, **“all divorces in one way or another are caused by sin; but not all divorces are sinful.”** -- Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*, 51.

Remember, Joseph, a righteous man, was not condemned for his intention to divorce Mary quietly for her alleged marital unfaithfulness. But God set the record straight!

² The exception clause is also found in Matthew 5:32, but there is more teaching on divorce by Jesus in Matthew 19.

³ One of the rabbinical schools known as the school of Hillel taught a very liberal interpretation of Moses' instructions on divorce (Deut 24) and they basically allowed for divorce “for any and every reason.”

b) DESERTION OF AN UNBELIEVING SPOUSE
The Teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians 7

1CO 7:12 To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³ And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

1CO 7:15 But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. ¹⁶ How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

1CO 7:17 Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.

Therefore, “*Paul clearly grants believers freedom to divorce when the unbeliever desires it.*” -- Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*” *Magnifying God in Christ*, 782.

A significant quote from Jay Adams:

“While God emphatically says, “I hate divorce” (Mal. 2:16), that statement must not be taken absolutely to mean that there is *nothing* about divorce that could be anything but detestable, because He, Himself, also tells us

...for all the adulteries which faithless Israel has done, I sent her away and gave her a certificate of divorce. (Jeremiah 3:8)

If God himself became involved with divorce proceedings with Israel, it is surely wrong to condemn any and all divorce out of hand. Obviously, from this passage...it is certain that sometimes, in some ways, divorce, for some persons, under some circumstances is altogether proper and not the object of God’s hatred.” -- Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*, 23, emphasis mine

4. Divorce **under any other circumstances** is not permissible according to the New Testament, and this is the clear instruction of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7.

1CO 7:10 To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. ¹¹ But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

Note: The Scriptures always permit remarriage for anyone whose spouse dies, but it must be to another Christian who is qualified to be remarried.

ROM 7:2 For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. ³ So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an

adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.

1CO 7:39 A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.

Summary Conclusions:

Divorce is a breaking of the covenant union of marriage and dishonors God.

God hates divorce and it was not a part of his original intention.

The Bible allows or permits divorce in only two situations: marital infidelity where reconciliation is not possible, and desertion of an unbelieving spouse.

All divorce in one way or another involves sin, but not all are sinful. There is such a thing as a “biblical divorce.”

Divorce for Christians under any other circumstances is expressly forbidden by Scripture.

Remarriage under forbidden circumstances is regarded by Christ as adultery.

Keep in mind though, that divorce is always a forgivable sin even though it will always have consequences.

When must treat this subject with sensitivity, yet with biblical fidelity.

If we confess our sin, God’s grace covers us. (1 John 1:8-9) Jesus’ approach to the woman at the well (John 4) who was married 5 times was an approach aimed at grace and forgiveness, not condemnation.

For further reading:

Dave Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do”*, Shepherd Press, 2007.

John MacArthur, *The Divorce Dilemma*, Day One Publications, 2009.

Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*, Zondervan, 1980.

Gary and Betsy Ricucci, *Love That Lasts*, Crossway Books, 2006.