

When 1 + 1 Doesn't Equal 2

Mark 10:1-12

February 12th, 2012

Introduction

Not sure if you are aware of the hoopla in the news right now concerning the topic of today's sermon, but the issue of marriage is front and center in the California news, and at the same time there is a side story which concerns the adverse to marriage: divorce. The main story concerns prop 8, a proposition voted in back in 2008 in California which banned gay marriage. Now, since that took place, proponents of gay marriage have been fighting it tooth and nail. Two of those proponents are *Robin Tyler* and *Diane Olson*, two women married just prior to the institution of prop 8, deemed by news media as the poster couple for gay rights. For the two decades that these women have been together, they have made it their life's work to fight for the right of gays and lesbians to get married to their partners. And as it seems they have won one of the battles in that fight, for just last week prop 8 was overturned by a federal appeals panel in San Francisco. But just recently something else took place, something which is being reported in conjunction with this announcement of the overturning of prop 8, namely, the divorce of the poster couple for gay marriage. Now, yes I must say I find it incredibly ironic that after fighting for all those years for the right to be married, just three years later they are getting a divorce, but that is not the reason I mention all this hoopla in the news, rather I bring this up to point out why California and this poster couple for gay rights, and society in general is in such a mess concerning marriage and divorce. The problem arises when someone or some group of people who are not qualified attempts to define marriage. Neither government, nor the voters, nor you or me, were ever intended to define marriage, for it us up to the One who invented and instituted marriage to define it. And when we look to God to understand marriage, we also come to understand divorce rightly.

And when we come to today's text we find Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce, and what we find is that 1 + 1 doesn't always equal 2; sometimes 1 + 1 = 1.

1. What Is Divorce?

a) Setting the Scene (v.1)

Now we need not spend much time reorienting ourselves with where we are in the book of Mark, only to remind ourselves of two things which Mark indirectly raises in our text. First, their location is "*the region of Judea, and beyond the Jordan*"(1a), which reminds us that

while most of the gospel of Mark concerns Jesus' ministry in Galilee, now Jesus and His disciples are heading for Jerusalem. This is of extreme significance because it is in Jerusalem that Jesus will serve the ultimate purpose for which He came, *"to give His life as a ransom for many"* (10:45). Jesus has told His disciples at least twice about His death and resurrection (8:31; 9:31), and in these later days before that He devotes much of His time to preparing them to be His witnesses by His Spirit (Acts 1:8) after He has ascended to the heavens. This leads to the second thing we notice here, namely that they have left the house (9:33) where Jesus was teaching the disciples privately, and they are travelling, and as happens often *"crowds gathered to him again,"* and while Jesus' focus was teaching the disciples, the crowds were there so *"as was his custom, he taught them"* (1b). So Mark kindly sets the scene for us, but it is the Pharisees who set the trap.

b) Setting the Trap (v.2)

The Pharisees are the "religious" folk of the day. They were at one time committed to abiding by God's Word, that is specifically the law of Moses as they were commended to do (Malachi 4:4), but by this point they had sadly become so consumed with the rules that they forgot about the Rule Maker. Somehow they had become so misguided that they thought they could work their way into God's graces. They thought they could earn their salvation. They thought that as long as their actions all lined up with God's commands that they were good. But they weren't. They were actually in deep trouble, destined for hell, so Jesus had some very stern words for the Pharisees, and amongst other condemnations he pronounced on them, He cried out against them: *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness"* (Matthew 23:27). In other words, as Jesus notes, the Pharisees were spiritually dead, and thus not God's people, regardless of the fact that they laboured day and night to appear so. And because they did that, Jesus continues: *"So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness"* (Matthew 23:28). You see, the Pharisees may have seemed righteous, but in their hearts they knew they were not, and one of their favourite ways of justifying themselves was to attack Jesus because Jesus attacked their false doctrine. And that is what happens here today, as yet again the Pharisees attempt to set a trap for Jesus. They are not really concerned about how Jesus will answer their question. They are not on a serious quest for the truth. They do not like Jesus and they do respect Jesus as a teacher. They want to catch Jesus in His Words. They want to discredit Jesus. They want to turn the crowds against Jesus. They want to trap Jesus. So the

Pharisees question Jesus in front of the crowds, and test Him with this question: *“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”*(v. 2).

Now, before we get to Jesus’ reply, and thus before we get to examine what Jesus has to say about divorce, let us not take lightly who Jesus’ audience is, namely, those who wish to test him. It is equally important though that as we examine what Jesus has to say about divorce that we recognize that we also need to consider who his audience was not. For that, I defer to an excellent word from commentator David Garland:

"Jesus is responding here to hostile questioners, who are bent on trapping him (10:2). We should therefore not expect to find in this passage instructions for the pastoral care of divorced persons. Jesus is not addressing those contemplating divorce and seeking his counsel or those struggling in broken relationships and needing encouragement. He directs his answer to bitter opponents, whom he has already accused of mishandling the Scripture and distorting God's will (7:6-13). His reply presents God's will for marriage, which challenges those who want to impose their own will on the marriage relationship."¹

So with that out of the way we can get to Jesus response to the Pharisees, and not one to back down from a war of words, Jesus takes the bait, steps right into the Pharisees trap, or so they think, but turns the tables on them. He actually sets a trap of His own for the Pharisees, not to exalt Himself, but rather to expose their misunderstanding, as *“He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away” (vv. 3-4)*. Now let this be a good reminder to us all that we should always say what we mean and mean what we say, for there is a major distinction between how Jesus asks His question and how the Pharisees answer. Jesus says *“What did Moses **COMMAND** you?”* and the Pharisees reply *“Moses **ALLOWED** a man to write a certificate of divorce”* (emphasis mine). You see, Jesus uses the Pharisees greatest weapon (their commitment to the law) against them. The problem is that they know that a man doesn’t *HAVE* to write a certificate of divorce, but that in many cases he *DID*. And because they know the law, when Jesus asks His question their minds immediately race to Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the law where we find this regulation concerning divorce: *“When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who*

¹ Garland, David, *NIV Application Commentary: Mark*

sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance” (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). The first thing which must be noted about this text is that it is not a commendation of divorce, but neither is it a condemnation of divorce. Clearly, we will come to a conclusive verdict concerning God’s views of divorce before we leave the building, but nevertheless we must not make Scripture say more or less than it says, and thus we must concede that Deuteronomy 24 is neither for nor against divorce. Rather, by implication it permits divorce in certain circumstances, namely, *“indecent,”* which yet presents yet another matter of debate for another time, namely, the definition of indecent. But for now, we must realize that there are more specific circumstances present in Deuteronomy 24, which basically go like this: (1) Frank marries Sally, but then divorces her. (2) George then comes along and marries Sally as he is permitted to do so. (3) George then either divorces Sally or he dies. (4) Frank is not now allowed to remarry Sally. I would love to explain why these regulations concerning this scenario were written; although, to do so we might have to go into a long discussion concerning how marriage took place thousands of years ago in Jewish culture and specifically what place the dowry played in the marriage. But because we have a whole lot more to deal with in this text, I will summarize by saying that this regulation concerning divorce and remarriage was for the purpose of protecting Sally from being taken advantage of, especially by Frank, her first husband. This regulation was not to promote divorce, neither was it an exhaustive theological treatment of divorce. What it does is tell us that divorce happened in certain circumstances, but was never commended.

But Deuteronomy 24 is all the Pharisees can respond with as they can’t bring to mind any other commands concerning divorce, but Jesus can. Yet before He draws their attention to the command He has in mind, first He explains why divorce was permitted.

2. What Is The Cause of Divorce? (v. 5)

a) Human Beings Are Sinners

Jesus’ answer hits right to the heart, literally, for Jesus points out to the Pharisees why Deuteronomy 24:1-4 even had to be written: *“Because of your hardness of heart.”* This is something we considered last week as we were in Psalm 51, as David lamented his sinful heart from conception with these words: *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5).* Why did Moses permit divorce, then? Because men and women, married people, are sinners.

b) Human Beings Have Hard Hearts

We have hard hearts that we have hardened because somehow we think that we know better than God does. How do I know this? Because this was what happened with my ancestor, with your ancestor, with all mankind's ancestor, Adam. Have you ever thought about what Adam's sin was? Was it eating the fruit? Was it listening to Eve who listened to the serpent? Well, in one sense, yes, but in another very important sense, no. Yes, both of those things are clearly condemned by the Lord (**Gen 3:17**), but ultimately there was another reason for which Adam was punished, and it is revealed just before God delivered the punishment: *"Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life"* (**Genesis 3:22-24**). How was it that Adam became like God, *"knowing good and evil"*? Was it that he now fully understood good and evil? Well, that doesn't really square up with the character of God. It is hardly logical to conclude that God would set Adam up for a fall, or handicap him by limiting his knowledge concerning things that he clearly needed to know to please God. This idea becomes less likely, especially when you consider that man was created in God's image (**Gen 1:27**), and after all of creation God concludes that *"it was very good."* (**Gen 1:31**). In other words, the clear implication is that Adam had everything he needed to honour God, thus it could not be that by knowing good and evil he now fully understood it. OK, well maybe it was that after he ate the fruit he understood good and evil experientially? Well no, I don't think that fits either for that would have to then mean that God has known good and evil experientially. And God has never known evil experientially, for God is perfectly good (**Deut 32:4; Psalm 18:30; Daniel 4:37; Matt 5:48**). Well, do not dismay for there is one last option, for to know good and evil, as God knows good and evil, is to determine what is good and evil. In other words, when Adam is condemned for knowing good and evil, the problem is that Adam attempted to determine for himself what is good and evil rather than trusting God's assessment of good and evil. Thus, Adam's sin is pride, that is, when he took and ate the fruit he declared not that YaHWeH is Lord, but that Adam is Lord. At that point Adam knows good and evil. Adam's heart was not soft to God, but was hardened towards God, thus he did what was right in his own eyes, rebelling against God. It is because of this hardness of heart, the sinfulness of our nature, that God permitted divorce.

In other words, as long as men and women are sinners, and have hard hearts, and think they know better than God, the sad truth is that divorce will occur, thus Moses offers regulations for such. But now we move to the crux of this conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees as Jesus explains...

3. What Is Wrong with Divorce? (Mark 10:6-9)

a) When Divorce Was Condemned (v.6)

We have returned to the first three chapters of Genesis already in this sermon, but now Jesus takes the Pharisees there directly to show them, and consequently us, why divorce is inherently wrong, and has been so since the beginning. What we find here is that for a complete theology of divorce we need to have a proper theology of marriage, and thus where to go, but to where marriage was created, the Garden of Eden. Marriage is not a modern convention. Neither is marriage ultimately regulated by the government. It was instituted by God, thus only God can say what marriage is or is not, and He said it way back when He created the first man and woman, for as Jesus says to the Pharisees: *“But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female’”(v.6)*. And while you may have heard someone say something trite like “God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve,” while I don’t find that kind of saying especially compassionate or helpful, the truth inherent in that comes directly from verse 6 of our text. The first reason that divorce is condemned is that marriage was to be one man and one woman. And while Christians like to emphasize the words male and female, as opposed to male and male or female and female, I think that we sometimes conveniently forget a word which is embedded in the grammar of this sentence, specifically concerning the form of these two nouns, which happens to be singular. In other words, what Jesus says about marriage is that from the beginning it was meant to be between *ONE* male and *ONE* female. And this was made conclusively clear, as God only created *ONE* male and *ONE* female. But maybe God meant one male and one female at a time. Maybe this only condemns polygamy, not divorce? Well, let’s see what else Jesus says to the Pharisees concerning...

b) Why Divorce Was Condemned

BECAUSE OF THE DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE (vv. 7-9): So, Jesus has established that marriage is between one man and one woman, but what exactly are the specifics of marriage? Well first, marriage involves separating from one’s parents, as Jesus says: *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife’ (v.7)*. The word translated hold fast does not refer to our modern day’s interpretation of entrance into marriage. Today, to hold fast is to give marriage a try and see if it works out. If not, we will divorce and try again with someone

else. No, this words means: “to adhere to closely, be faithfully devoted to,”² which expresses the significance of the marriage commitment. But then what follows is what I think is the strongest argument against divorce in all of Scripture, for Jesus goes on to define marriage with these words: *“and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (v. 8)*. This is where we discover that 1 + 1 doesn’t always equal 2, but instead in the case of marriage 1 + 1 = 1. And lest we think that this only refers to the physical aspect of a marriage relationship, we best understand that it is the physical aspect which demonstrates the emotional/mental, spiritual aspect. In other words, the outer demonstrates the inner, not vice versa. You see, when two people get married, what they are saying at that point is that I am no longer me, I am now us. It is a declaration of unity in all things, unity in values, unity in morals, unity in finances, unity in purpose of life; basically unity in mind, body and spirit. And you wonder how long this unity is binding? Well, you hear it at the end of the typical marriage vows: “Til death do us part,” or the way God says it: *What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (v. 9)*. In other words, if a marriage is according to the will of God, then no man or woman, especially the husband or wife, can, or should separate it. So, in light of God’s definition of marriage as one man and one woman until death do them part, there cannot be any question about God’s view of divorce: He condemns it because, as we learn in Malachi, He hates divorce (**Mal 2:16**). But this is not where the teaching on divorce ends, because it is not only the definition of marriage which makes divorce wrong, but...

BECAUSE OF THE DEFINITION OF REMARRIAGE (vv. 10-12): Now at this point the Pharisees have apparently heard enough, and Jesus and His disciples retire to a place of privacy where Jesus continues teaching. While what He has said about divorce is difficult, what He says about remarriage is even more difficult to swallow: *“And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (vv.11-12)*. So if you thought Jesus’ views on marriage and divorce were extreme, just think for a second about His views on remarriage. Basically what He says is that remarriage equals adultery. Now let’s stop and investigate this for a minute, first by confirming the definition of adultery, for in my experience most people’s view of adultery is fairly narrow, while Jesus’ is very wide. You see, Jesus tells us that adultery is not only restricted to actions, but also to thought, when He said *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman*

² Προσκολλάω Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28). But what about adultery when it does concern physical acts? Well, as made clear in Jesus words in Matthew 5, adultery concerns sexual infidelity in action and/or thought, so any unchaste acts or thoughts outside of the confines of a marriage relationship qualify as adultery. You see, adultery is not restricted to two individuals, both of whom are married to other individuals. Neither is adultery even restricted to two people, one of which is married to someone else and one who is not. Adultery is any act of a sexual nature between two people who are not married. But now that we have that covered, we must recognize that Jesus’ definition of adultery is even more wide-reaching, for He says that adultery is also any unchaste act between two people, one of whom was married but isn’t anymore, or between two people who were married before but aren’t anymore. Now that is heavy. In other words, what Jesus seems to be saying here is that there is no good reason for divorce and remarriage, not only because divorce is caused by sin, but also because remarriage causes further sin, specifically the sin of adultery.

And this concludes our treatment of the text where we find out what divorce is, what causes divorce, and why divorce is wrong. But this does not conclude the sermon, for if you are anything like the disciples, my guess is that you might be somewhat troubled by how narrow and constricting Jesus’ views of divorce are. You see, they had such a difficult time wrapping their heads around Jesus’ teachings on divorce that Matthew records that they concluded from Jesus’ definition of marriage that maybe it was better not to enter into such a significant commitment if divorce was a possibility (**Matt 19:10**). Well, Jesus replies that if you can do it, that is, stay unmarried, then do it (**Matt 19:12**). But what about the rest of us?

What about those who have been divorced, who are thinking about divorce, who have been impacted by divorce, and so on. Well, I think it would be helpful, before I conclude the sermon, to offer a...

Disclaimer:

While I know some of your scenarios, I do not know them all. Furthermore you are likely taking what you hear today and applying it to someone you love that has been involved in divorce, maybe even yourself. So before you pull out your rotten vegetables, there is something which must be said, especially considering the fact that I’m not Jesus, yet I am attempting to teach what Jesus taught. By that, I mean to say that Jesus can say these things and say them with perfect compassion and perfect condemnation because He knows the hearts and circumstances of every man and woman who heard His teaching that day, and

*who continues to hear that same teaching today ... but I do not. In other words, I do not know your hearts, nor do I know each one of your individual circumstances. So, let me just caution you not to assume anything concerning what I have said. If there is a scenario concerning a marriage where adultery has taken place (**Matt 19:9**), if there is a situation where someone was divorced before they were saved (**2 Cor 5:17**), if there was a situation where one spouse passed away (**1 Cor 7:8-9**), or there is a situation where after marriage one spouse gets saved and one doesn't (**1 Cor 7:12-16**), these are all situations which Scripture addresses. Furthermore, while Jesus teachings on divorce and remarriage are black and white, our lives are not, thus if you have questions about your specific scenario, or even of possible scenarios that you want to discuss, like for example in the case of abuse, I implore you to set up a time that we can sit down and talk about that.*

I won't stand here for one second and in any way imply that I have all the answers, but I will work with you to discover what would honour Christ the Lord in any and every circumstance, for that is why we exist, to glorify God in all things, and that is why I pastor, that I might assist God's people in glorifying Him in all things.

Conclusion

a) God's Statement on Divorce

And when it comes to what would glorify God concerning marriage, the bottom line is that divorce was never intended to happen because when it comes to marriage 1 + 1 doesn't equal 2, it equals 1. Divorce is caused because of the hardness of our sinful hearts, and while it is permitted in some cases, it is never commended, but rather it is condemned. It is a sin that we will be held accountable for, but no less is it a sin for which Christ died.

b) God's Solution for Sin

You see, we live in a world plagued with divorce because we live in a world plagued with sin. But there is a solution for our sin. His name is Jesus, the Son of God. He exists eternally as the second person of the Triune God. He was sent by the Father to redeem a group of people out of the world for His glory. He did that by living a perfect life, dying a sacrificial death, bearing the penalty of the sin of His people and receiving the wrath of God which we rightly deserved. He was then buried in a borrowed tomb, but three days later He rose from the grave and He now resides at the right hand of God the Father. After Jesus ascended, the Father sent the Holy Spirit to indwell believers so that they would spread the good news of the Gospel, as the Holy Spirit breathes life into the hearts of His chosen people.

c) The Call

Are you one of those chosen people? There is one way you can be sure, simply by honestly answering this question: Who is Jesus? Is He the perfect Son of God who died for your sins? Then answer God's call to all people to repent of your sins **(Acts 17:30)**, that is, change your mind about sin. See it the way God sees it, as rebellion against Him, and turn away from that sin.' But don't stop there, for as you turn away from sin turn to God, casting yourself on His mercy and declaring Him as Lord **(John 3:16)**. If you do that, on the authority of God's Word, I can assure you that you will not be disappointed, for *"if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"* **(Romans 10:9-10, 13)**. Amen.