

¹ *And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them.* Mark 10:1 Leaving Galilee for the last time, Jesus and His disciples went to the south to Judea and then to the eastern side of the Jordan which was called Perea. This was the area in which Jesus faced the temptation in the wilderness and where distant relatives lived in the town of Kochaba. It is the place His ministry began being baptized by John the Baptist. There James and John began following Him. His ministry had come full circle. Jesus' recollection of the Baptist declaring that Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world was surely on His mind. He would never return to Galilee.

Once again the crowds enveloped Jesus and the disciples, and as was His custom, He used the opportunity to teach about the upside down world of the kingdom of God, where to save your life is to lose it (8:35ⁱ), the greatest is servant of all (Matthew 23:11ⁱⁱ), treasure is laid up in heaven rather than on earth (Matthew 6:19,20ⁱⁱⁱ), and the first will be last and the last will be first (10:31^{iv}).

² *And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"* Mark 10:2 Here they come again, trying to test Jesus and find fault in Him to justify the sins Jesus has pointed out in their lives. They think Jesus is winning a competition for the hearts of the people, but Jesus is not competing, He is exposing sin to help people recognize the need to repent and find new life in Him. He wants the Pharisees to humble themselves so that they can be exalted (Matthew 23:12^v). He wants the common person to recognize hypocrisy so they will not imitate it. He is setting the captives free from the prison of sin just as Isaiah predicted (Isaiah 61:1^{vi}). But most of the Pharisees only see Him as a threat to their influence. They want to be able to point to some false teaching so they can discredit Him.

Their attack question was based on the interpretation of the law of divorce. There were two main schools of interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1 which reads, *"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,"* The question was over the word indecency. The liberal rabbi Hillel focused on "displeased" saying indecency could be something as minor as spoiling a dinner or letting one's hair down in public, or being rude to one's parents. The more conservative Shammai ruled that it must be some kind of marital impropriety. Adultery was punished by stoning so it would have to have meant something short of that.

Certainly, Jesus, like His Father, hates divorce as Malachi declared (Malachi 2:15,16^{vii}). How would Jesus deal with this seeming contradiction between the Law and the prophet? If Jesus came down completely on the side of Malachi, they could say He was teaching against the Law from Moses. If He sided with either rabbinical interpretation they could turn the other side against Him. I would guess that they were thinking He would side with Shammai because of His compassion for women. Jesus, however, always sides with the Father. They were going to get an answer that they did not expect.

³ *He answered them, "What did Moses command you?"* ⁴ *They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away."* Mark 10:3,4 Jesus surely knew the trap they were trying to set, so He asked them to first recite the Law

regarding their question. They recited it in an abbreviated form, leaving out the fact that it had to be for some indecency in the wife. Women could not divorce their husbands in the early Israel period but were allowed to during the era in which Jesus lived. The way they recited the Law showed them clearly on the side of Hillel. That interpretation was prominent through the first century and became even more lenient. Rabbi Akiba said that if a man found a woman more beautiful than his wife it could be reason for divorce. This just shows us the proclivity of man to twist things to suit our desires. Guard your hearts men.

It is important to understand that women in that day would find it very difficult to survive without a husband providing for them. I think they took this line of attack because these Pharisees saw that Jesus welcomed women followers, healed them, and was willing to listen to their pleas.

⁵ *And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.* Mark 10:5 Some commands were given to us which were not instructions in holy living, but rather to limit the damage from our carnal nature. Jesus was hitting at the very root of their interpretation, which was their evil hearts' desires. They interpreted it how they wanted to interpret it. It is a warning to us to look at the reason we choose an interpretation. Sometimes it is to go along with culture so that we will be accepted. Sometimes it is because of our pride in a doctrine we cling to.

How can we know we are interpreting a passage correctly? Jesus illustrates it in the next verse by going to the very source of the issue, the very first marriage. We should see what other Scripture says with an open mind and an honest desire to come to the truth found in the Word. We know Scripture will not contradict itself. There are some passages that are very difficult to comprehend or understand God's intention, but most issues of importance are easily understood.

We should realize that the Bible is the most studied book in the world and has been for two thousand years by great minds and people with a heart to get to the truth. That is why most orthodox beliefs and the creeds are never going to change. That is why it is unlikely you will find something of major significance in the Bible that everyone has missed. There are of course many non-essential details and surprises to be discovered, but the main things have been known for centuries. Our desire to be unique and have found something most people have missed is often a pride problem. We see that with many Christian bloggers. They are often not a part of any church because they think no one understands like they do and everyone should listen to them. And when you put it that way, it is easy to see the issue. That is what Jesus did by saying, *"Because of the hardness of your heart He wrote this command."* He went on to teach them how to rightly divide the Word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15^{viii}).

Some issues in Scripture are referred to as solid food, which is for the more mature (Hebrews 5:12^{ix}). When I try to explain to someone why their interpretation is falling short of what the Scriptures declare, they rarely change their mind even when they read what I am trying to share with them from Scripture. One of the most frequent issues is regarding the Law. People will pick out portions of the Law and declare God is not pleased with us because we do not do this or that. If it is a moral issue, I agree. God is not pleased with us when we lie, because He is truth. God is not pleased with us when we commit adultery, because He is faithful and marriage is a picture of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32^x). If we are in Christ our heart will convict us and we will not want to do those things.^{xi}

⁶ *But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'*
⁷ *'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, ⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.'* So they are no longer two but one flesh. Mark 10:6-8 Rabbis recognized that the earliest uses of words in Scripture play a key role in understanding the later use of the word or principle. Jesus goes back to the beginning, which shows He believed Genesis is an historical account. Verse six tells us there are two genders. Biology tells us there are two genders. Your chromosomes are either XX or XY. That is how God made us. We may be confused or have unnatural desires, but we cannot change the facts.

God made two genders to be united as one. The man is to leave his father and mother. The two are forming a new family unit. When a man keeps depending on mom and dad, it creates problems in the marriage. Couples need to form their own traditions and work together to make their home. They still honor their father and mother, but they are no longer under their authority. The woman has placed herself under the man as the head of the new home. The man is to love his wife like Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25^{xii}). The woman is to respect her husband like she respects the Lord (Ephesians 5:22^{xiii}). Of course, they are both to seek the Lord first and foremost, and when they do so together, their bond grows stronger.

Becoming one flesh includes sexual intimacy which is essential in marriage. In rare cases couples can live together without that intimacy and be just as united, but that is the exception (1 Corinthians 7:4,5^{xiv}). We have a natural desire for that intimacy. It is a form of our oneness. Hormones that are released during intimacy help us bond. We are no longer me and you but us. Jews saw this intimacy as sealing a marriage covenant. It was what began the weeklong marriage celebration. Some countries still think along these lines. Western culture however has abandoned this concept and cheapened sex which has created so many problems in our society: broken homes, blended families, marital difficulties, insecurity, fatherless families, and depression to name just a few.

Jesus schooled those who were testing Him by bringing them back to the beginning and God's intention. Yes, Moses gave them the law of divorce so that the woman forced out of the home by the hardness of the husband's heart would not be wondering for years if he would take her back. In other words, this was a law written for the woman when the man fails to live up to his vows, but it is not God's plan for them.

⁹ *What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.* Mark 10:9 Jesus is declaring that marriages are ordained by God. You may have thought that you picked your spouse, but it was God who put you together. In third world countries where marriages are arranged the divorce rate is very low. That is because the chance of remarrying is very low, so the couple works through things for their sake and that of the extended family. They do not consider getting out of a marriage. There are no exit signs. Instead, there are only merging traffic signs. Get together and work it out. Find a way to deal with the problems. In a few weeks Mariko and I will celebrate our 50th anniversary, not because we are "divine soul mates" but because Jesus helps us overcome.

Let not man separate is a divine imperative. We are ordered by God to not separate. Monogamous, enduring marriage is God's design for marriage because Jesus will never leave or forsake us (Hebrew 13:5^{xv})! Divorce was never part of the plan. The Deuteronomy passage is not permission to divorce but what must be done if man's heart is hard and insists on it. Man is used in the sense of human being, husband, or wife.

I have heard the excuse so many times, “God does not want me to live this way, being miserable.” You are right, so get counseling and change your attitude. Now of course that does not necessarily include if a spouse is unfaithful or is abusive. Get help from a Christian counselor who can help the two of you to work through your issues. There is always a way to work it out *if* both parties are willing to try. It may take years but doing so honors God and keeps the command Jesus is giving us here. If God put you together, then that problem you face in your marriage is there for a reason. It is something you need to learn to deal with and to grow spiritually. If you run from it, you will probably have to face it again in some other way.

¹⁰ *And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter.* Mark 10:10 Matthew tells this with more detail. The disciples said to him, *“If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”* Matthew 19:10 This shows us the disciples understood Jesus’ teaching to be just like we read it. Marriage was as difficult then as it is now. Men and women are very different. It takes a lot of grace and commitment to work through things and learn to live together in love and harmony graciously deferring to one another (Ephesians 5:21^{xvi}). I think the disciples were probably a bit shocked and were asking for clarification, as if God’s desire for marriage is more than man is capable of.

¹¹ *And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; ¹² and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”* Mark 10:11,12 A man who divorces his wife and remarries another has committed adultery against the wife he divorced. They covenanted to make their lives one, and he violated that covenant. The same goes for the woman. If she leaves her husband and marries another she has broken the covenant with him and is therefore an adulteress.

I knew a lovely church going couple that I thought were very happy. The wife was wooed away by her employer and left her husband. She wanted a more exciting, fulfilling life. She thought her life was too boring. A few years later, she realized that what she thought was boring was actually a very good life. When she returned to her husband, it was too late. He had remarried. She had broken the covenant by being one with someone else, which allowed him to remarry.

Our culture’s attitude toward divorce is not much different from Israel in that time. We ignore God’s design thinking we will be happier or more fulfilled and we end up finding out what we have lost. Like Israel we can suffer God’s discipline in life when we rebel against His commands. The prophet Malachi wrote, ¹⁴ *... the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. ¹⁵ Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.* Malachi 2:14,15 The consequences will hurt others as well. God’s way is always the best way, but too many times we think we know better. God always knows best. The Apostle Paul gives more clarification on this matter in his letters. (See 1 Corinthians 7:8-16).

For those of us who have failed in this regard, know that our righteousness is of Jesus, not our efforts at a perfect life. We still deal with the consequences of our sin, and because of His great love for us we should desire to do His will more than our own (Matthew 6:33^{xvii}). When we think of what Jesus dealt with out of love for us, can we not endure working on our marriage until it more faithfully represents Jesus and the His bride the church? What He puts up with in us is way more than what we put up with.

Matthew's account of this teaching adds an exception clause. ⁹ *And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.*" Matthew 19:9 First we must understand what the word Matthew chose for Jesus' Aramaic "unfaithfulness." It is the Greek word *pornea*. This is the source of our word pornography. It covered any type of illicit sexual affair. The Law prescribed stoning for a woman who committed adultery. In the time of Christ only Rome held the power to execute someone, so instead of death, divorce was expected. It is likely the woman would be shunned from her community. Unlike Hillel and even the stricter Shammai, Jesus only permitted divorce due to the sexual unfaithfulness which is what Moses' command implied. This goes with Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. ³² *But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.* Matthew 5:32

This goes back to His argument that God's intention from the beginning is that the two become one flesh. Therefore, the infidelity of a spouse violates the one flesh bond. In doing so he or she illustrates the picture of being spiritually unfaithful to God which the prophets and James referred to as adultery (Isaiah 54:5^{xxviii}; Jeremiah 2:2^{xix}; Ezekiel 23:37^{xx}; James 4:4^{xxi}). It is not a command to divorce if that is the case, but it is permitted. If there is repentance, the couple should try to recover their marriage, but if the infidelity is blatant and ongoing, divorce is probably inevitable. In that case the faithful spouse is free from the covenant as it has been broken by the unfaithful spouse.

To those who have failed to keep to this teaching and have divorced and remarried for something less than infidelity, remember that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1^{xxii}). We should repent (1 John 1:9^{xxiii}). We should be resolved to never fail again in this sin. We should expect consequences to affect our marriage, but we should not think that God loves us any less. You may have been an immature Christian when you failed in this regard, or you may have done so in willing defiance of Jesus' teaching. Willful disobedience calls into question our salvation (2 Corinthians 5:17^{xxiv}). If you are a new creation in Christ you will be grieved over sin and strive to walk in obedience, fearful of the consequences of disobedience, and broken hearted over your failure. But that should not keep you from being all God has called you to be. Remember that King David gave in to this sin (2 Samuel 12:9^{xxv}). It cost him dearly, but he wrote that God will not despise a broken and contrite heart (Psalm 51:17^{xxvi}).

Jesus said, ²⁸ *But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* Matthew 5:28 That means most men need to repent of this sin. Thank God for His mercy. Be even more determined never to fail in this regard again. Men, guard your eyes and your thought life. Make sure your wife is secure in your love. Women, avoid provocative dress, and focus on your husband's good qualities, and show him respect (Ephesians 5:33^{xxvii}). By the grace of God may we always walk in the Spirit and love one another as Christ loves us (John 15:12^{xxviii}). And for those who are single, make Jesus your spouse. He is the best (1 Corinthians 7:7,8^{xxix}).

Questions:

- 1 Where was Jesus going and why?
- 2 What was the trap set in the Pharisees question?
- 3 What was Jesus' reply?

- 4 What were the competing rabbinical thoughts at the time?
- 5 What did Jesus say was the reason God gave the Deuteronomy rule?
- 6 How can we interpret the Bible correctly?
- 7 What was Jesus' conclusion to the matter?
- 8 Why were the disciples surprised?
- 9 What exception did Jesus give in Matthew?
- 10 What is spiritual adultery?

ii **Mark 8:35 (ESV)**

³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

ii **Matthew 23:11-12 (ESV)**

¹¹ The greatest among you shall be your servant.

¹² Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

iii **Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

iv **Mark 10:31 (ESV)**

³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

v **Matthew 23:12 (ESV)**

¹² Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

vi **Isaiah 61:1 (ESV)**

¹ The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

vii **Malachi 2:15-16 (ESV)**

¹⁵ Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.

¹⁶ "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

viii **2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

ix **Hebrews 5:12 (KJV)**

¹² For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

x **Ephesians 5:32 (ESV)**

³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

^{xi} But when the issue has to do with a religious act, Christ is the substance of which all religious acts pointed. We go to Him in prayer, praise, and worship. The obedience to the Laws of Moses such as to what you eat or the day you worship or what you wear or do not wear all point to Jesus. James said that if you trust in the Law you have to keep it all (James 2:10^{xi}). But you cannot because the temple was destroyed and God let that happen because Christ was the end of the law to all who believe in Him. I did not come up with it. That is the word of the Apostle Paul: ⁴ *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.* Romans 10:4 Righteousness never came by the law. It was always by faith in God. The redeemed soul will have the law of God on their heart. Eat kosher and rest from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset if you like but know it does not make you any more righteous if you do or less righteous if you do not. The LORD is our righteousness. Your heart will convict you when you break the moral laws of God. If we boast in our works or trust in them to merit righteousness, we have missed the whole point of Jesus' sacrifice. ²¹ *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* 2 Corinthians 5:21 He is God's sacrificial Lamb. He is our Great High Priest. He is our kosher meal. He is our Sabbath rest.

xii **Ephesians 5:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

xiii **Ephesians 5:22 (ESV)**

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

^{xiv} **1 Corinthians 7:4-5 (KJV)**

⁴ The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. ⁵ Defraud ye not one the other, except *it be* with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

^{xv} **Hebrews 13:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

^{xvi} **Ephesians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

^{xvii} **Matthew 6:33 (ESV)**

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

^{xviii} **Isaiah 54:5 (ESV)**

⁵ For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.

^{xix} **Jeremiah 2:2 (ESV)**

² “Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD, “I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.

^{xx} **Ezekiel 23:37 (ESV)**

³⁷ For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. With their idols they have committed adultery, and they have even offered up to them for food the children whom they had borne to me.

^{xxi} **James 4:4 (ESV)**

⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

^{xxii} **Romans 8:1 (ESV)**

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

^{xxiii} **1 John 1:9 (ESV)**

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

^{xxiv} **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

^{xxv} **2 Samuel 12:9 (ESV)**

⁹ Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

^{xxvi} **Psalms 51:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

^{xxvii} **Ephesians 5:33 (ESV)**

³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

^{xxviii} **John 15:12 (KJV)**

¹² This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

^{xxix} **1 Corinthians 7:7-8 (ESV)**

⁷ I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

⁸ To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am.