

Hymns: 54 Oh, How I Love Jesus 8 Great is Thy Faithfulness  
9 His Eye Is on the Sparrow 3 Amazing Grace!

Scripture: Psalm 119:1-8; 51:1-10

Big Idea: No Divorce

It's good to see you all survived the hurricane. It seems like we dodged a bullet. Thankfully, power stayed on at our house.

Speaking of dodging bullets, the current nominee for the Supreme Court, Judge Brent Kavanaugh has been dodging bullets for the past few weeks now and still has more to go this week.

The circus in Washington, D.C. is not **unlike** what Jesus faced as He did battle with (of all people) the **religious** leaders of His time. His opponents were **envious** of Him and **feared** that He would convince the people to abandon them and follow Him.

The Pharisees were among those out to get Him. They plotted and schemed to trap Him with His words. Of course, they were completely out of their league. Even when they thought they defeated Him, Jesus prevailed.

Today, we're going to look at one of those instances as we continue to explore Jesus' difficult teachings. In the New Testament, we have five places where reference is made to Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce. What He taught perplexed men back then. Not surprisingly, it still does today.

Let's take a look at it, understand the difficulty, and then home in on the truth. We'll start with Mark 10:2-12. The context here is the time when Jesus was making His final trip from Galilee to Jerusalem as He headed for His destiny to die and rise again.

Mark 10

*[2] And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?  
[testing] him.*

Jesus must have tired of these antics.  
We read about them over and over.  
They wanted Him to stumble  
and say something they could use to discredit Him.

*[3] And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you?*

Jesus answered them with the word of God. That's a great strategy.

*[4] And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.*

The Pharisees knew the Torah and especially all of the **loopholes**. In the case of divorce they used this passage in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 to justify dumping a wife they no longer cared for if she made **any** mistake – such as burning the beans.

What a sad world that must have been where husbands looked for one slip-up as

justification for divorcing their wives. Unfortunately, the laws of our society today actually **encourage** and **enable** divorce and as a result **discourage** marriage. Satan hates the family and all that it represents.

*[5] And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the **hardness of your heart** he wrote you this precept.*

Notice this carefully. Jesus agreed that law was there, but then moved ahead with **God's ideal**. As we've seen over and over, Jesus does not **diminish** the law but **elevates** it from a table of rules to a condition of the **heart**.

He proceeds to describe God's purpose and God's **ideal** regarding marriage.

*[6] But from the beginning of **the** creation God made them male and female.*

*[7] For this cause shall a man **leave** his father and mother, and **cleave** to his wife;*

The meaning of the word *cleave* has changed since **the** time of King James. What it meant back then in this context was to *stick together* or be *bonded together*.

*[8] And they twain shall be one flesh:  
so then they are no more twain,  
but one flesh.*

*[9] What therefore God hath joined together,  
let not man put asunder.*

So what would you say Jesus just said about divorce? Clearly, He said divorce is **not** an option. It **never** was part of God's plan.

*[10] And in the house*

The disciples and Jesus withdrew to the house.

*his disciples asked him again of the same matter.*

Clearly His disciples were perplexed by Jesus' hard line on marriage. Is there really no escape from a "bad" marriage?

*[11] And he sai[d] unto them,*

*Whosoever shall **put away** his wife, and marry another,  
commit[s] adultery against her.*

*[12]*

*And if a woman shall put away her husband,  
and be married to another,  
she commit[s] adultery.*

At least we can say that Jesus was consistent both with His *law to the nth degree* position and His repeating what He said to the Pharisees when He taught His disciples. We see that same view in the Luke account:

The context remains the same – Jesus’ final trip to Jerusalem.  
Luke 16

*[17] And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of **the law** to fail.*

A tittle is like the dot we use over a lower-case *i* or *j*.  
Jesus came to earth and lived a perfect life **as** demanded by the law and to go to the cross and redeem us. The law is still in force. So with that background, Jesus nails the Pharisees with the **spirit** of the law.

*[18] Whosoever put{s} away his wife,  
and marrie{s} another,  
commit{s} adultery:  
and whosoever marrie{s} her that is put away from her husband commit{s} adultery.*

But you say, aren’t there some other accounts where Jesus seemed to be less strict on the divorce issue? Yes, there are two in the Gospel of Matthew. We will take the second first since the context is the same as the two we just reviewed. This differs enough from the Mark passage to repeat parts of it.

Matthew 19

*[3] The Pharisees also  
came unto him,  
[test]ing him, and  
saying unto him,  
Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife **for every cause?***

Note this *cause* they’re referring to is the most trivial error such as burning the biscuits.

*[4] And he answered and said unto them,  
Have ye not read,*

Jesus is **mocking** them. These are the **learned ones** who **know** the scriptures. Of course they have read this:

*that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,*

It goes on from here as in the Mark passage. We’ll skip ahead:

*[8] He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives:  
**but from the beginning it was not so.***

God did not ordain marriage so that it would be broken in divorce.

*[9] And I say unto you,  
Whosoever shall put away his wife,  
**except it be for fornication,***

*and shall marry another, commit[s] adultery:*

There it is! Jesus gave an exception: **except it be for fornication**. So perhaps Jesus is **not** a hardliner on divorce after all.

*and whoso marrie[s] her which is put away  
commit[s] adultery.*

*[10] His disciples sa[id] unto him,  
If the case of the man be so with his wife,  
it is **not good to marry**.*

Rather than be encouraged by a supposed **loophole**, the disciples again see marriage as a **daunting** commitment. In fact, they suggest based on that, that celibacy is the better option.

Notice, this is the second account (of the same event) where we see the disciples acknowledging that this teaching from Jesus is **difficult**.

*[11] But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.*

That is for sure. Most theologians and even many fundamentalists are confused by this teaching or they completely misunderstand it. Jesus then answers their proposition regarding celibacy.

To paraphrase, Jesus neither condemns nor condones celibacy. Instead, he just acknowledges the different reasons there are for being celibate. Indeed, Jesus Himself never married. The Apostle Paul elaborates on this in I Corinthians chapter 7 – often called the marriage chapter.

Our final gospel reference to Jesus teaching on divorce is actually His first chronologically. It appears in the Sermon on the Mount – given early in His ministry:

Matthew 5

*[31] It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:*

*[32] **But** I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, [except] **for the cause of fornication**, cause[s] her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced commit[s] adultery.*

Most Christian religions hold that Jesus permits divorce on the grounds of fornication. Even many solid fundamental Bible teachers teach that view. We have two gospel passages that contain the exception and two that do not. Where can we gain further insight?

How about context? First let's look at what **precedes** this Matthew chapter 5 passage:

Matthew 5

*[27]*

Notice the parallelism here with verse 31. Both that verse and this start out quoting scripture.

*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit **adultery**:*

There's that word that He's been using in each of these divorce passages. What does He say about it? We've already been down this road in a prior sermon.

*[28] But I say unto you, That whosoever look[s] on a woman to lust after her ha[s] committed **adultery** with her already **in his heart**.*

He goes on to say if your eye offends pluck it out, if your hand offends cut it off. It's better to be maimed and mutilated than to go to hell. We learned that body parts are not the issue but it is with what directs those body parts -- the heart.

Do you see? This hard-line, heart-based, teaching of the law appears right before the fornication exception statement. He's making the law even more impossible to keep by insisting that lust after a woman (a condition of the heart) is adultery.

So if the exception phrase regarding fornication means that He permits divorce under that condition, virtually every husband, if not also every wife, would be a fornicator (in his or her heart) and thereby could justify divorcing his or her adulterous partner. That would make divorce **always** justified. It would be a loophole big enough to drive a Mack truck through -- even bigger than the one the Pharisees used, and the disciples would certainly not see marriage as too risky to consider.

So context screams that **the** fornication loophole **cannot** be interpreted that way. But we have still another proof. What's the best commentary on the Bible? That's right. It's the Bible, of course.

If we only had a reference in the Bible that expounds on this particular teaching of Jesus. As a matter of fact, we do! It kicks off the marriage chapter alluded to earlier.

In I Corinthians 7 verses 1 through 12:

*[1] Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me:*

This is the Apostle Paul speaking. He's answering a letter containing particular questions about marriage.

*It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*

He, just like Jesus, is saying that celibacy is a good thing.

*[2] Nevertheless, to avoid **fornication**,*

There's that word again.

*let every man have his own wife,  
and let every woman have her own husband.*

He's acknowledging the sex drive is strong, and God's remedy is marriage.

In verses 7 and 8 he returns to the option of celibacy as good reiterating what Jesus taught but with a caveat:

[9] *But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.*

That is to burn in sexual lust.

Notice he's been right in line with Jesus teaching up to this point. Now he's explicit:

[10] *And unto the married I command, yet not I, **but** [who?] **the Lord**,*

Here it is. He's saying he is repeating what the Lord taught.

*Let not the wife depart from her husband:*

Notice carefully here. He did not say *except for fornication*. That exception is nowhere to be found in this passage.

[11] *But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband:*

There's more of that one-man-and-one-woman-for-life principle that Jesus taught. Notice too he gives the option of separation – but not divorce.

*and let **not** the husband put away his wife.*

Again, he says nothing of a fornication exception.

[12] *But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: ...*

In other words, he just finished repeating what Jesus taught. From here on, he will expand with further teaching to answer questions that were not addressed specifically by Jesus.

So from scripture, we can see the weight of evidence is **against** the wide fornication exception to permit divorce. What remains then is to understand what that exception phrase actually means.

Here are some clues.

First, the word *fornication* itself can give us some insight. The Greek word is por-nā'-ä. Note the familiar sound to our word *porn*. In the Bible, we have multiple places where forms of this word are used. Here are some examples:

1. Consensual incest (I Corinthians 5:1)
2. Sex with a harlot (I Corinthians 6:16-18)
3. Premarital sex (I Corinthians 7:1-2)
4. Lustful passion (I Thessalonians 4:3-5)

How do we know which of these usages Jesus is referring to? I checked with my Greek neighbor. He agreed the term covers a broad range. However, the one example he gave me was of premarital sex as it is a very common usage of the word. Could that be the meaning Jesus intended? Let's see.

Notice these two exceptions appear **only** in the Gospel of Matthew which definitely has a Jewish slant.

Matthew also describes Joseph's challenge when he discovered his **espoused** wife Mary was pregnant **before** they consummated their marriage. They were engaged but were called husband and wife at that point.

Matthew 1

*[18] Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was **espoused** to Joseph, **before they came together,***

Scripture is so explicit her with regard to the virgin conception of Jesus.

*she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.*

*[19] Then Joseph her **husband**, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public[] example, was minded to **put her away** priv[ately]. (That's the same phrase Jesus has been using for divorce.)*

Despite Jesus being conceived by the Holy Ghost and many signs to announce and demonstrate that, His critics and many Jews believed He was the product of fornication – that is **premarital** sex. In a heated exchange the Pharisees made that accusation to Jesus in a backhanded way.

John 8

*[41] ....., **We be not born of fornication;***

... implying that Jesus was.

***we have one Father, even God.***

Jesus went on to say that their father was the devil. This was a heated exchange. Also, it's interesting to note Jesus' precision of word usage. He specifically chose the word *fornication* for the exception and then *adultery* for the offense. It's clear to me that Jesus was using the common, **narrow** Jewish meaning that described breaking of the betrothal before consummation. The bottom line is Jesus teaches strictly divorce is not an option. He never taught that it was.

### **Application**

So why does this matter? The Christian family is the foundation of society. Jesus taught that it must be solid. Satan understands this and is working overtime to destroy this bedrock of virtue. Indeed, the battle raging in Washington, D.C. right now is satanic and has family values at its very core.

But there's more. In Ephesians 5, we are told that marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. If marriage can be broken, the analogy is seriously flawed since the bond between Christ and the church can **never** be broken.

In Hebrews 13:5 we read: *I will **never** leave thee, nor forsake thee.* God keeps His covenants. May every Christian couple do the same.

### **Benediction**

*Now the God of peace,  
that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,*

*that great shepherd of the sheep,  
through the blood of the everlasting covenant,  
Make you perfect in every good work to do his will,  
working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight,  
through Jesus Christ;  
to whom be glory for ever and ever. (Hebrews 13:20-21)*

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