

2 Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

3 “What did Moses command you?” he replied.

4 They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”

5 “It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied. 6 “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’^[a] 7 ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,^[b] 8 and the two will become one flesh.’^[c] So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

10 When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. 11 He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. 12 And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”

13 People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” 16 And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

Don't Run

Have you ever felt like running away? There was a time as a child when I felt like I wasn't being appreciated for all the things that I did (taking up space and in general being a nuisance) in the family and I'd run away. So I'd run off, hide, mope around and then run home before the streetlights came on thinking, “That will teach 'em...” Life could tough, there is homework, chores, and a curfew to contend with and it didn't get easier as an adult. Sometimes with the amount of work to do it may seem easier to run away and start over. We like this idea that any struggle can be overcome by leaving it behind, cutting it out of your life, starting all over. Life can be difficult, marriage and children can be difficult but problems aren't overcome by running away from them. Some people are on the streets because they have run away. Some people are still running. But there is a problem. You can't ever run away. Usually we are the source of our problems and they follow you.

Jesus confronts the Pharisees who are trying to run from the law. They want to be free and feel free and do whatever they want to do. They also want to put Jesus in a position where he would create a problem for himself with one group or another. Whether you have been married, divorced, single, or still searching Jesus' words won't allow us to run from the law. Jesus points to the problem, the reason people run away from marriage: it's a condition of the heart caused by sin.

I'm guessing just about everyone in this room has felt the impact of divorce in one way or another. You can't run from it. Nor can you run from the fact of what God has done to overcome hard hearts for us through Jesus. He has bound himself to us by baptism. He calls the church, his bride. He brings us into his family and he runs after us.

At this point in Mark, Jesus is still jogging in one direction to Jerusalem and it's as if the pace is picking up as each lap goes by. Jesus has made passion prediction no. II and no. III is on the horizon. Jesus is running to the cross. He's gaining in popularity and the Pharisees want to put an end to it. So they test Jesus, baiting him with a trick question. If Jesus says, "Divorce is Ok" they would condemn him as a false prophet speaking contrary to the words of God in Malachi 2:16, "I hate divorce." But if he were to say, "It's not ok to divorce," then they would say he is running counter to Moses who in Deuteronomy 24 allowed divorce. Either way Jesus would offend one group or another but Jesus isn't about to debate legality over rules that were written long ago.

Jesus asks, "*What did Moses command?*" They respond with, "*Moses permitted*" us to write a letter and run away from our women. They bring up Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which regulates divorce but it does not command or permit divorce it simply controls it. A woman with or without children whose husband had run away is at great risk. This law was never meant as a command but as a concession in order to mitigate that risk. The Pharisees saw in this law an opportunity to run away.

Jesus responds, "*Moses wrote you this law because you were going to do it anyway. Because you are sinners. Hard of heart, unable, and unwilling to follow God's Law.*" They turned marriage into a contract of mutual convenience and Jesus goes back to the original intent. The very nature of marriage does not begin in Deuteronomy 24 but in Genesis 2. God made them *male and female* and marriage "*is why a man leave his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.*" In marriage there are no longer two independent beings who run their own way but one single indivisible unit working together for their own good. There is no legal loophole to justify adultery or sacrifice one's spouse to satisfy desires or ambitions. Deuteronomy 24 was added because of *the hardness of your heart.*

Jesus makes an absolute prohibition of divorce. You can't run from this. What God has joined together let no one separate. Marriage is not based on concessions to feelings but on the pattern set by God's original intent at the creation of man and woman. God's design includes unbroken lifelong marriage - not an "ideal" but the realistic standard to which we are expected to conform. That means, "Don't run away!"

Yes there are rules for running away. We too, have passages as an excuse. We'll point to 1 Corinthians 7 and state, "Abandonment" or Jesus' words in Matthew and state, "Sexual immorality." There are reasons for divorce. But no divorce at all? Even the disciples in the other Gospels react, "*It's better not to get married at all...*" The world around us would have us abandon marriage altogether as the last vestiges of a bygone patriarchy, but marriage has done more for women than the modern

feminist movement. Previous to marriage women were treated as property. God gave family and marriage as a gift to be enjoyed, not to be abused.

God's will for us is that there be no divorce. *"what God has joined together, let man not separate."* (v.9); and yet, *"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,"* The problem lies with the human heart. The idea of "Follow your heart," not only unbiblical, it's stupid. Jeremiah writes, *"The heart is deceitful and beyond cure who can endure it?"* (Jeremiah 17:9). That's a problem that you can't ignore or run away from. If it gets bad enough you won't be running anywhere. It needs immediate attention, sometimes radical surgery to become healthy again. Jesus links the need for divorce to a hard heart, and although not permitted, divorce is at times necessary for the safety and welfare of the spouse and children.

Remember that Jesus isn't giving us the be all and end all discourse on marriage. This is not an honest conversation on marriage. The Pharisees are testing Jesus, looking to trip him up. While we'd like to be able to say, "I did things the right way." Jesus is upsetting standards and pointing out that no one has the right to hold their head high just because they haven't had a divorce. Jesus points out that, *"If anyone looks at a woman lustfully he has already committed adultery with her in his heart"* (Matthew 5:28). Sometimes people run away from marriage, sometimes people run from their problems. Divorce is desertion abandoning one's duty or post without permission. There are consequences for a family especially a family with children. There are consequences to rebelling against God's commands running away from his law be it divorce, adultery, sex outside of marriage... Those consequences will follow you and hound you wherever you go. That's why Paul writes, *"Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God"* (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

That doesn't sound like good news for anyone. God's Kingdom is out of our reach. God's standards are perfection, not desertion. Thankfully Paul continues *11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God* (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Paul tells us, we have one who didn't run away, desert his post, or abandon his bride (the collective church). He was committed to the cross. Jesus took our consequences upon himself as a sinner and suffered God's wrath. He didn't give up on his bride, but bore the brunt of a jealous God. He became that object that got between God and his bride for our sake. He suffered in our place. With that kind of love can you imagine him giving up and running away from his bride?

The disciples still don't get it. They imagine they must be pleasing to the eye, good runners. They thought they had to be someone special, important, great in God's Kingdom. And great people don't waste their time with little children. Children had few rights and essentially no social status - so they tried to stop the children. Jesus *became indignant*, "*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these...unless you receive the kingdom of God like a little child you will never enter it.*" How does a little child receive gifts? They gladly take them. Unearned, undeserved but freely given. Here Jesus blesses the children those who are hurt the most by divorce.

God didn't file for divorce, he filed for forgiveness. Because of that commitment every sin of your imperfect marriage and mine is forgiven at the cross. God sent his son to bring us back together. God places a hedge, the law around gifts worth protecting. At the center of the ten commandments next to life itself is family, "Honor your mother and father." God has not only blessed us with forgiveness he has also given us family and marriage which makes family. In every marriage God intends to give you a reflection of Christ's relationship with you. The beauty of a lifelong commitment. The beauty of doing a million little things for the other person with no condition of love in return. How do you know you're married to the right person? Check your marriage certificate. *What God has joined together let no one separate.* God has joined you together. If God has joined you together, he can keep you together. He provides companionship. He provides children, the one flesh. He allows us to bring our children to him.

God hasn't run away from us. He has never abandoned or left us behind. He brought us into his kingdom through baptism and there he makes a promise to us that cannot be broken but only rejected and run away from. In Lord's Supper he reminds us again of his love for us. Renews his commitment to us. God gives us Godly pastors and counselors who are committed to helping married couples as well as those who are single, by bringing the "healing" Word of God; God's gracious gift of confession and absolution; to every situation, no matter how bad or helpless it might seem. He reminds us Divorce is forgivable. You're absolved, completely and fully forgiven in Christ.

Cherish your family. Cherish your marriage. Don't think for even a moment that divorce is an option. If you are having problems seek help. Remain in God's Word. Don't hinder your children from coming to Jesus but bring them and be there for them.

Receive this gift, his kingdom like a little child. Don't force some loving, caring, trusting, 20th century garbage on Jesus' words but see them as love for the unlovable. Those unable to do anything for you. Children are dependent on their parents and they know it which is why we return home after we run away. I may have thought, "I taught them a lesson," but they still let me back into the house.

Mark 10:2-16

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They still let me be part of the family. So it is with God. You're family now and you can't run away from that. Amen.