

The Pharisees wanted to test Jesus, so they asked Him, “Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?”... OK, “What are the grounds for divorce, Jesus?” “When is it legal?”

Now I reckon that question itself, was a pretty fair indicator of ‘where their hearts were at with God’... They were religious, and they wanted to make sure that they didn't break God's law... And so they wanted to know, “Where's the line?” ... But their hearts weren't right... They didn't want to know what they could do to please God – they wanted to know what they could get away with...

Do you understand the difference?

A child who wants to please his parents will generally help out around the house – if the eggs need collecting, they'll collect them – if the dishwasher needs unpacking, they'll unpack it – if their room is a bit untidy, they'll clean it up....

But some children – well actually probably most – will only do what they have to... “So my name is on the roster, and I only have to do these jobs today, so that's all I'm going to do.” ...

One is living by law – the other is living by loving relationship... And until you begin to understand that disciples of Jesus Christ live by loving relationship, through the grace of Jesus Christ, you're going to have trouble understanding the relationship between law and grace...

Because we are in a loving relationship with God, through the grace of Jesus Christ, we strive to live in a manner which is

pleasing and honouring to God because we love Him and we want to please Him...

The one who lives by law says "I'm not allowed to do this!" or "I must do this!" or "What am I allowed to do in this circumstance?"

Where as the one who lives by grace says "In Christ I am free. And I'm free to live in a way which is pleasing to God... Therefore, how can I please God most, in this circumstance?"

Do you understand the difference now? Rather than asking "What am I allowed to do", it's the freedom to ask "How can I most please God?"

And so the Pharisees asked, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"

That's a living-by-law question – What can I get away with?????

And there's something else that lay behind that question – in their day, there were two different schools of thought... One teaching – from 'Shammai', took a conservative line, and would only allow divorce in cases of adultery... The other school of thought, was from 'Hillel', who took a much more liberal view, allowing divorce for virtually anything that the wife did, that displeased her husband – even for example, if she made a habit of burning the bread when she baked, or if he was displeased with the way she looked....

Now, you can probably guess which school of thought was becoming more popular – just as today, divorce has become very easy...

And so, what the Pharisees were trying to do, is to see which line Jesus took – was He a liberal, or was He a conservative when it came to divorce?

But Jesus wouldn't play that game, because that's the legal game... Instead of answering the legal question "When am I allowed to get a divorce?", Jesus pointed them towards Scripture, to show them what **marriage** is **really** about.... And when you know what Marriage is about, you really don't have to ask the question about divorce....

If you live by law, you'll be looking at this passage, trying to find the answer "When is it OK to get a divorce?" But if you live by grace, you'll discover in this passage, how in your life and possible marriage, you can most honour God...

OK??? So Jesus gives us 6 wonderful truths about marriage:

1. Firstly, marriage is designed by God. The one who created us, created marriage.

I find it quite interesting at the moment, that our nation legislates in respect to marriage, and it seems that the voice that most politicians listen to today, is not the voice of God, but the voice of social opinion ... And so, our country's understanding of 'marriage', is getting drawn further and further away from the intent of our creator, and yet He's the one who made it.

So remember, marriage is a good thing, and it is designed by God... Therefore it should be honoured by all.

2. Secondly, marriage is meant to be complementary – God made them male and female,

I don't know if you've noticed it or not, but 'men and women are different to each other' – Have you ever noticed that? And the difference isn't just the obvious anatomical differences (although they're important too)...

Men and women are different... And no, it's not a defect in the other sex – God designed us that way. God designed men and women to be different – to complement each other...

It is not a defect in your man, that he enjoys to go out shooting or fishing, or driving heavy machinery, or playing footy... It is not a defect in your woman, that she enjoys cooking, or sewing, or watching a girly movie – it is not a defect that she doesn't like car parts on the kitchen bench...

These are not defects – God designed us to be different – not so we can repel each other – and maybe not even so we can attract each other – but so that we can complement each other....

In some circles, we would made to feel as if we had to apologise for ever even thinking such a thing – that men and women are different... And the PCP (you know what that is – the political-correctness-police) would condemn us for ever

saying such a thing – that there are God-ordained differences between men and women.

There is a complementarity between the sexes. And that is why marriage is between a man and a woman. And that is why it's a complete absurdity – the notion that men could marry men or women could marry women...

And Tony Abbot was quite right to challenge the constitutional validity of the ACT's same sex marriage laws... At this stage, Australia's Marriage Act states that marriage is between a man and a woman... That reflects God's design, but I don't know how long it will stay that way.

I don't know how long it will be until we follow the path that New Zealand has already taken. The Uniting Church of Australia, is one denomination that has already begun the discussion as to whether marriage has to be between a man and a woman, or not.

God has designed us as men and women... Never be ashamed of your gender... Men – be men – but be Godly men – be honourable men – be loving men....

Women – be women – but be Godly women – be honourable women – be loving women....

Marriage is meant to be complementary... A man and a woman, complementing one another.

3. Thirdly, Marriage is intended to be permanent...

In Australia, the median duration from marriage to divorce (for divorcing couples), is 12.2 yearsⁱ. 12.2 years... Most of us make our cars last longer than that.

God designed marriage to be permanent. ... **the two shall become one flesh'**

In 2002, I badly broke my ankle... And at the time, the surgeon said "We'll give it a go and see how it goes, but the chances are, you'll probably end up having to get it fused... And he was right... 3 or 4 years later, that's exactly what I did...."

And during the decision process, he said to me, "This is likely to be the biggest decision you'll ever make in your life. It's bigger than buying a house – it's bigger than choosing a job – it's bigger than getting married... – There's no going back.. Once it's done – it's done and can't be undone...."

They took 2 bones, and joined them together to form one bone... And it'll be one bone forever. To part them, I would have to smash them apart...

But, I had to disagree with him. When he said "It's a bigger decision than who you're going to marry", his outlook was "If you choose the wrong woman, you can always get a divorce and get married again".... But he's wrong. *When Robyn and I got married, we became 'one flesh' It's like we're glued together and joined, like that ankle joint of mine... and if we tried to separate, it would tear us to pieces...*

Marriage is meant to be permanent...

4. Fourthly, marriage is exclusive.

A one-flesh relationship is formed by the union of 2, and no more...

Michael Green wrote this:

The man is united to his wife. He becomes one flesh with her. No way is he permitted to have a little flutter on the side, any more than she is. Each is pledged to find fulfilment in the other, and so to discover on earth a model, however inadequate, of the permanent relationship between God and the believer which nothing can breakⁱⁱ.

The marriage relationship is exclusive.

5. Fifthly, marriage involves a shift in **existing** family relationships.

Jesus said, **a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'**

Some of the biggest problems I've seen within marriages, has been because either the husband or the wife, (or maybe both of them), have not left their mother and father.

Perhaps, a newly married couple may find themselves living at the home of one of the sets of parents.... Bad idea...

Or the wife might be on the phone to mum every day of the week, or the husband on the phone to his mum or dad, every day of the week.... (bringing all these extra people into their marriage, who do not belong)

Marriage involves leaving **and** joining... You **leave** your parents behind, and are **joined** as husband and wife... The umbilical cord, is cut – When you get married, you're not tethered to your parents.

Before you were married, you might have discussed the deep issues of life with your mum or dad... Your parents might have been the sounding board for your hopes and dreams and plans and ambitions... But when you get married, your husband or your wife, should be that sounding board – there is a shift in your family relationship...

I have to accept that when my children marry, they're no longer part of my nuclear family – my family unit... They will form their own, and they will add children to their own...

I hope and pray that we will continue to have a special, loving bond with them, but when you get married, you leave your parents, and are joined to your husband or your wife...

6. Finally, Marriage is not for everyone.

There are some lovely Christian people who I know, who have never been married. And sometimes we married people think we have to fix that – we provide the match-making service to fix their **disability** of being single.

We love marriage so much and are made whole by two-becoming-one flesh, that we couldn't possibly imagine, anybody being better off by being single... but some people are...

And God calls some, to be just that. He gives to some, the gift of singleness. And we should never, ever make single Christians feel as if there is something wrong with them, because they don't have a husband or a wife... Marriage is not for everyone.

So, that's what Jesus taught about marriage:

1. Marriage is designed by the creator
2. It is meant to be complementary (male and female complementing each other)
3. Marriage is permanent
4. Marriage is exclusive
5. Marriage involves a shift from existing family relationships
6. And marriage is not for everyone

Yet still the Pharisees wanted to know about divorce – legalism...

"Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?"

What a terrible mis-representation of what Moses said...
Moses never commanded them to send their wife away...
Moses commanded them to give her a certificate, so that she could be free to marry again, when out of their hardness of

heart, they cast aside their wives, like yesterday's newspaper....

Jesus replied,

"Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. ⁹ And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

Divorce, is not the unforgivable sin.

If someone comes to me for counselling and says, "I want to divorce my husband or wife.", I counsel them not to...

Sometimes for a person's safety (or sanity), they may need to be separated... But I counsel them not to get divorced...

Why???

For 2 reasons:

1. Firstly, I'm not a psychologist. I'm not here to give worldly advice... I'm a preacher and a teacher, and God says, "I hate divorce". Jesus says, "Marriage is permanent". You see, marriage is a covenant, which in God's eyes should not be broken. And so I have to say, what God teaches us in His Word.
2. The second reason I counsel people not to get divorced, is because I believe in a God who changes lives, and who knows how God plans to change husbands and wives, to complete the one-flesh relationship and make it beautiful...

But regardless of this, you and I both know that we live in a society where many people, including Christians, **have** been divorced...

So, if you have been divorced, where do you stand with God?

And so I say it again, “Divorce is not the unforgivable sin.” ...
There is life after divorce.

God's grace is sufficient for you, as it is sufficient for me.

You see, I don't always do what's pleasing to God, but
through His grace, I am forgiven, and through His grace, you
are too.

And it doesn't matter if you're single, or if you're divorced, if
you're married, or if you're re-married, live to please God,
with the rest of your life that you do have:

1. Marriage is designed by the creator – it is good, and it is to be honoured
2. Marriage is meant to be complementary (male and female complementing each other)
3. Marriage is permanent
4. Marriage is exclusive
5. Marriage involves a shift from existing family relationships
6. And marriage is not for everyone

Knowing this, honour God today. Honour God tomorrow.
Honour God in your life.

Questions?????

Let's pray together:

Lord Jesus Christ, merciful God our saviour,
We made vows on our wedding day, and in so many ways we
have failed to keep them. We have not loved our wives as
Christ loved the church. We have not respected and honoured
one another. We have not held fast to one another. We have
not cherished and forgiven one another. ... Lord forgive us.
Lord, forgive us for when we have desired someone other than
our spouse, and for breaking faith with the wife or husband of
our youth. ... Lord forgive us.

Heavenly Father, please fill us with your Spirit, and transform
our marriages, so that they will truly be a sign and witness of
the relationship between Christ and His Church.

Lord, deepen our love. Strengthen our bond. And fill our
marriages with joy and peace.

And Lord, we pray for those here today, who are not yet
married. Lord, may they even today, be preparing for the one
they will marry, by honouring marriage in society, and by
keeping themselves pure, in preparation for their day of
marriage.

In Christ's name

Amen.

ⁱ<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/A180106877C39F25CA257AC500113195?opendocument>

ⁱⁱ Michael Green, The Bible Speaks Today – The Message of Matthew. Inter-Varsity press. 1998