



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 10:1-12

"Let No Man Put Asunder"

Mark 10

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Thank you, Howard, and good morning. Our passage is Mark chapter, but I think it would be appropriate if we began by reading from Deuteronomy chapter 24. So let me suggest that you turn to Deuteronomy – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy – page 293 in my version of the Bible. The reason is because this passage is really the background for the discussion that takes place in Mark chapter 10 between the Lord and the Pharisees, so if you have that passage before you, follow along as I read verses 1 through 4 where Moses instructs Israel.

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her" – and that's an expression that we'll spend a bit of time examining as to its meaning – "and he writes her a certificate of divorce" – another expression that's important to our discussion as well – "and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, and if the latter husband turns against 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 husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance."

Now turn over to Mark chapter 10. We'll look at verses 1 through 12.

"And rising up, He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; and crowds gathered around Him again, and according to His custom, He once more began to teach them. Some Pharisees came up to Him, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. And He answered and said to them, 'What did Moses command you?' They said, 'Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.' But Jesus said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this cause, a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh; consequently, they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.'

"In the house, the disciples began questioning Him about this again. And He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her'" – that is, against his first wife – "'and if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.'"

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study together. Let's bow now in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for this great privilege we have to come together as the body of Christ, as a people chosen out of a fallen mass of humanity from eternity past. Not chosen because of any merit within us, not chosen because you could see in us faith, because as you look upon man, you see that there's none who seeks after God – no, not one. We were all rebels. We were all turned against you. We were all your enemies and yet that's the condition in which you chose us for yourself from all eternity, before we had done either good or bad, and sent your Son to purchase us for yourself. Thank you for that great work of redemption that He accomplished on our behalf.

Help us to think about that, Father, contemplate who we were, what we have been redeemed out of, what we have become in being made the bride of your Son and all of the great privileges we have in union with Him and being members of your family with an inheritance that's beyond our comprehension, with the indwelling of the Spirit as we live in this world that gives us enablement, that gives us wisdom, that guides and directs us. We marvel over all that we have, Father, as we begin to reflect upon it and just think about it. It's amazing, it's your grace that has extended that to us and we thank you for it.

This is a time that we can set aside within your Will this day of the week to come together as a people, as the body of Christ, and open the Scriptures and study them together, feast upon them and learn what your Will is for us and learn of your character. Yet, Lord, sometimes we come to difficult passages and that's the case with the text that we consider this morning. Difficult for a number of reasons but difficult because it reminds us of a lot of painful situations that are very real and very present today. We pray for instruction from this text, and we pray for the families of this church, the families that are and the families that will be, we pray that you would protect them, bless them.

Give husbands and wives a very great concern for one another and for their families and for the testimony that they have before this world, which is so unfaithful. Turned against itself, certainly turned against you. May we be examples of fidelity. May we be examples of faithfulness to one another and in so being, examples of faithfulness to you and illustrations to the world of your faithfulness to us.

We pray your blessing upon us as we study this morning. Instruct us and teach us and encourage us. It is a great privilege to come together and to read the Bible and to study it. It's a great privilege also to come together and intercede for one another in our office as priests, and so we do that as well and we remember those in great need. We, in light of our passage, think of families that are going through difficulties and struggling and perhaps even facing

divorce. Pray that you'd intervene, that you would heal the breach that is there that from our perspective may seem unbreachable, that may seem a situation that cannot be corrected.

And yet you can raise the dead, you can correct family problems of the worst kind, and we pray that you would do that and encourage others who are not having problems to maintain a good relationship with you and with one another. Pray for those who are in distress in other ways. We pray for those who are physically afflicted. Pray for those who will be entering the hospital this week for surgery and other treatment. We pray that you'd bless, that you would give healing, that you would bless the physicians and the nurses and give those who are in this condition, in this need, the encouragement and the confidence that you stand with them, that you never leave or forsake your people.

Bless those in financial need. We pray that you'd make provision for them, give them encouragement. Bless our young people. We pray for those who teach them, for parents that teach them. Help them to continue to do that and be faithful in that task. For the Sunday school teachers and the youth leaders, we pray that you'd bless them in their great and responsible tasks, that they would work diligently and that you might let them see the fruit of their labor. Pray for others, the secretaries and those who do the maintenance work in this facility. Bless them. We thank you for their service and pray that it would continue and continue to be done in the joy of the Lord.

We pray for this assembly, that you would bless us with a love for you and help us this evening as we come together to celebrate the death and the burial and the resurrection and the coming again of your Son, that a time in this evening meeting would be to that end and that it would be a sanctifying time and draw us closer to one another and closer to you. May we sense your presence this evening. May your hand of blessing be upon that meeting. May it add to this meeting in preparing our hearts for the week ahead, that we would serve you well and serve you faithfully in all of the various situations in which you

will lead us, that we might stand firm in your truth and be witnesses in testimonies.

We pray for our nation, we pray for our leaders. Give them wisdom. Bless them greatly in the troubled world in which we live. We pray that they would have wisdom to serve you, whether they realize it or not, by doing that which is right, and in so doing, bless the church throughout the land, throughout the world, that it may prosper and truly be a light in a dark place. Bless us now, Father, as we sing our final hymn and bless us as we turn to the Scriptures together. Bless our time, that it would be profitable for each of us and would bring honor to you and glory to the name of your Son. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] The subject of our passage this morning is marriage and divorce. Not a particularly pleasant subject but certainly a timely one because we're living in a day in which the family is under siege and divorce has increased to epidemic proportions. We're being told that about half of the couples that will get married this year will end up in divorce court. And that's not just a problem of the world. The epidemic has spread into the church. Some churches even have special Sunday school classes for divorced people, and most all of us know couples, Christian couples, who have either divorced or are in the process of doing so. It's an all-too-common problem.

So what does the Bible teach about divorce? Does it permit it? If so, under what circumstances? Does it permit remarriage? Does divorce hold out any options for the Christian? Is that something that we can actually contemplate doing? Every marriage – even Christian marriages have their problems, but is divorce a legitimate solution? Well, the Bible speaks very directly to this issue. God declares in Malachi 2:16, "I hate divorce." That's pretty direct. But the Lord deals with the particulars of this issue at least to some extent in our passage this morning, and he addresses it out of a situation that's very similar to our own. Divorce is not a problem that's unique to our day.

Our Lord lived in a day when the divorce rate was very high, when marriages were dissolved rather easily. That was true among the pagans. We might expect that. Jerome, who lived in the 4th century, tells of one Roman who married her 23rd husband and she was his 21st wife. Seems almost impossible to do that, but that's what he said. As I said, you might expect that among the Gentiles, but it was also a problem among the Jews. They were divided roughly into two schools of thought on this subject of divorce. There was the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel. Rabbi Shammai was known for his strict interpretations of Scripture while Hillel was known for freely interpreting the Bible.

Shammai taught that the Scriptures permitted a man to divorce his wife for sexual immorality only, so he restricted it to that while Hillel taught that a man could divorce his wife for almost any reason. And the discussion of divorce was really a man divorcing the wife, not the wife having the option of divorcing the husband, so it was somewhat one-sided. But those were basically the two options that were held out and you can imagine which was the most popular of the two. One writer states that in many pharisaic circles, the frequency of divorce was an open scandal.

Josephus writes on the subject. He himself was a Pharisee and a divorcé and in his opinion, divorce was permitted for any causes whatsoever. So there were many, many divorces in that day, and so in our Lord's day, He was speaking to the very issue that troubles us in a situation that's very much like our own. And He has some very sobering words, not only for Israel of His day but the church of ours.

The Lord and his disciples had been moving south, as you know if you've been following along in the lessons. They began in the northern region of Israel on the slopes of Mount Hermon in Caesarea Philippi and they've moved south to Galilee and returned to Capernaum, but Galilee is not the Lord's destination. His great ministry in Galilee has finished, and He is now on His way south to Jerusalem and to the cross. So from Galilee, He travels south into

Samaria and then into the region of Judea, then unexpectedly turns east and He crosses the Jordan River into Perea on the east bank, and this was Herod's domain.

This is the region where John the Baptist had ministered and where he had been arrested. You'll remember from chapter 6 that John was imprisoned and then later beheaded because he exposed the marriage of Herod Antipas to Herodias as immoral. Now, Herodias was the wife of Herod's brother, Philip, but when the two met in Rome, they became infatuated with one another, divorced their spouses, and then they married one another. It was a marriage built on passion, an illegal and an immoral relationship, and John paid with his life for saying so. Now, that's the setting for this discussion that follows in our passage.

While the Lord was in Herod's territory, teaching a crowd of people that had gathered around Him, some Pharisees approached him with a question on divorce. Whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife. They weren't honestly seeking information from the Lord on this subject. Mark tells us in verse 2 they were testing Him, trying to trap Him in a controversy. Since divorce was so common, no doubt many of the people in this crowd that circled our Lord had been divorced, probably held various opinions upon it. And so they were seeking to catch the Lord in an unpopular answer and in so doing polarize opinion and divide the people against Him.

There may also have been something more sinister in their question. With the Lord in Herod's region, they may have been trying to draw statements from Him that would have gotten Him in trouble with Herod and with the result, they hoped, of causing Him to meet the same fate as John had met. So they raised this issue of divorce with Him, a dispute, a long-standing dispute, that centered around the clause in Deuteronomy 24:1 which states that if a man marries a woman and then finds some indecency in her, he may write a certificate of divorce, put it in her hand, and send her out.

So the whole matter of what constitutes a lawful divorce hangs on the meaning of that expression, indecency or uncleanness, which is found in her. Literally, the Hebrew expression translates "nakedness of a thing," which is somewhat vague. It sounds scandalous and no doubt it was, but it's vague enough to have led to differences of opinion and to the disputes that followed as to its meaning. We've already discussed the school of Shammai and Hillel. Shammai interpreted the text narrowly to mean moral indecency, particularly adultery, while Hillel interpreted it broadly to mean, in addition to any moral fault, anything that caused annoyance or embarrassment to the husband.

A woman could be considered unclean if she accidentally spoiled the meal she was preparing. If she put too much salt in the chicken soup or burned the bagels, well, that was enough to consider her unclean and file or sue for divorce. Indecency could be found in her if she talked too loud in the house so that the neighbors next door heard the conversation or if she was seen talking to men in the street. It got even more frivolous later with Rabbi Akiba – famous rabbi – who took it so far as to teach that if a man found a woman who was more attractive to him, then he could divorce his wife. Sounds somewhat contemporary. But that was the situation in our Lord's day.

So there was a strict view and there was a broad view, but the truth doesn't seem to rest with either one of these views. It couldn't refer to adultery. That might seem the most logical conclusion that we would draw and we would think that Shammai was right in saying that, but it couldn't refer to that because as you read through the Old Testament, you read through the law of Moses, you know that the penalty for adultery for both a man and a woman was death. Couldn't even refer to suspicion of adultery because there was also a provision for that recorded in Numbers chapter 5 with the rite of bitter water, and the looser interpretation of Hillel doesn't have support from the expression "uncleanness" or nakedness of a thing," which clearly



suggests something shameful, not some mistake that the wife might make.

Probably the meaning is somewhere in between these two schools, not adultery but something shameful, something indecent in connection with the sex life. Nevertheless, it was the broad view that won the day, at least among the men, and so divorce became quite prevalent, and here the Pharisees try to draw the Lord into this very hot debate. But He wouldn't be drawn in. He wouldn't let them set the tone of this discussion and instead He turned it on them with a question of His own. In verse 3, he answered, "What did Moses command you?" "If you want to know the answer to your question, just read your Bibles."

A few weeks ago on Wednesday night, Dr. Johnson described the way that Dr. Barnhouse would handle questions. After some of his sermons, people would come up and challenge him on a point or raise a particular question, and what he would do would simply be to hand them the Bible and tell them to look up the verse, "Look up 1 Corinthians 10:4, read it, what's it say?" And it would answer their question. Let the Bible speak for him. Well, that's a good way of doing it. He finds its precedence in the Lord because that's what He did. He referred them to the Scriptures and they answered. "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away," referring to Deuteronomy 24:1.

So according to them, Moses said divorce was okay as long as a certificate, as long as a legal document, was issued by the husband. Now, it's true that Moses gave the instruction that a certificate be given to a woman upon divorce, but that had nothing to do with God sanctioning or encouraging divorce. It was a legal document designed to give legal protection to the woman. How it did that is not altogether clear. Deuteronomy 24 stipulates that once the divorce occurs and the woman has remarried, then the original husband can never remarry her if circumstances occur in which she's free to marry. So the purpose may have been to restrict frivolous divorces.

The husband would have been made to think twice before he hands his wife that certificate of divorce because he knows that she's free to then go remarry, and if she remarries and he has second thoughts, it's too late. So it may have been designed to curtail divorce, frivolous divorces, but also the certificate would have provided the woman with a legal document which firmly established that she was actually divorced, that her former husband had no further claim upon her, that she was free to marry, and in so doing, her reputation would have been protected. So the bill of divorce was required for the protection of the woman, who was almost always the victim in the divorce case.

We get a sense of that by just considering the station of women in Jewish society in that day, and I think we get a sense of that in the famous morning prayer, which was prayed by the men, by Jewish men and really no one else. It reflects this status of women because they would pray, "God, I thank you that I am not a Gentile, a slave, or a woman." So to level the playing field a bit in this male society a legal certificate was guaranteed to the woman for her protection.

But you see what the Pharisees had done here. They'd taken a provision of the law that was designed to limit divorce, that was designed to discourage divorce, and used it to justify divorce. As John MacArthur puts it, they considered divorce for whatever reason fine as long as the necessary paperwork was done. Well, we could point the finger at the Jews for doing that, but Christians do the same thing. They can take a principle of Scripture and give it a totally different meaning than it has by twisting it to suit their own purposes.

For example, a man's unhappy in his marriage, but he knows the Bible well enough to know that he doesn't have any grounds for divorce. So he finds grounds where they don't exist. He says, "I'm so miserable in this relationship, totally unhappy in it, and I can't believe that God is pleased with this. He wants me to be happy, and since I can't be happy in this marriage, it must be okay for me to divorce. At least that's the lesser of two evils." Well, it's true that God wants us

to be happy, at least happy as He defines it. He says, "Rejoice always," so we're commanded to be joyful.

But happiness can never be obtained by contradicting God's revealed Will. God is not inconsistent. He's not illogical. Happiness is found within His Will, and it can only be obtained by obedience to His Will. And if a person looks to Him, if a person seeks to live according to the Scriptures, if a person has as his or her desire to please God and has as his great goal, as the chief end of his life, to glorify God, then God will, by the help of the Holy Spirit, enable that person, male or female, to find fulfillment in a very difficult marriage. Find even happiness, I believe, joy in that kind of a relationship.

That's not to minimize the difficulty and the tragedy of some marriages. I know that they can be very, very hard, unbearably hard. The kind of marriages that a person in the flesh apart from the Spirit of God cannot endure, but God is a providential God. He is in control of all things. He works all things according to the counsel of His Will, and even these terrible situations, these burdensome marriages, fit within His Will, and that thought can be a great encouragement. The knowledge that "as difficult as this is, I'm where God would have me to be," and to look to Him for strength every day to do that.

Well, we can do that in God's strength, but sin has that effect upon us of causing us to become irrational and men do become irrational when they're caught up in sin and they begin to rationalize what is clearly wrong. And that's what the Pharisees were doing. They were twisting the Scriptures to fit their conclusion.

And so the Lord responds by clarifying the command of Moses concerning the certificate of divorce, and then He gives the Biblical view of marriage and divorce. Verse 5: Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. In other words, Moses' permission of divorce was an accommodation to human weakness. It was a concession to sin. It was not an encouragement to sin but it was a concession to sin. God did not intend for marriage to be broken. He designed it to be a lifelong union. But taking into account man's

sinfulness, God made provisions to limit and control sin's consequences, which could be great within that unhappy relationship.

A divorce is brought about by sin. One way or another, with one person or another, divorce is brought about by sin. As the Lord says, by the hardness of heart. And Moses' provision for divorce with a bill of divorcement was to mitigate the effects of that sin, to protect from its worst effects those who would suffer because of it – usually the woman. But the rabbis had failed to see that and imagined that by allowing divorce, God approved of divorce and was encouraging divorce.

So to show that this is not the case, the Lord goes back to the creation, He goes back before that law or that instruction by Moses was ever given, He goes back to the very beginning, goes back to creation where the original design of marriage is seen. Quoting from Genesis 1 and 2, the Lord says in verses 6 through 8: But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall become one flesh. Consequently, they are no longer two, but one flesh.

So look to the very beginning. Look to that state in human history when there was no sin, when things were perfect, when things were ideal, and marriage was established. It was established in that environment, established from the very beginning. It was implied from the very order of creation, from the very constitution, physical constitution of the man and the woman, God made them male and female. He didn't make them male and male. God made two people corresponding to each other. So we can see from their very makeup, the way they were made, that marriage is the implied end toward that creation. They were made with a view toward marriage.

And marriage is designed to be an intimate union. They would leave father and mother and become one flesh, not just physically one but spiritually, emotionally one. There would be a knitting together of the soul. Genesis 2:24 says leave and cleave, and that word

"cleave," it's a very strong term. The Hebrew word *devak*, which you get the sense of how strong it is from the noun form of it, which in modern Hebrew is used for glue. You go the hardware store and ask for some glue in Jerusalem, this is the word that you'd use. It was the word for glue, and so has that sense here. Marriage between two people is like that. People are stuck together in marriage. Doesn't mean they're stuck with each other, but they are stuck to each other, they're glued together, and they shall become one flesh, the Lord says.

So there's solidarity in marriage. The two are no longer to be considered two but they're to be considered one. Those who formerly were separated, those who were independent individuals, were not bound to each other before marriage, they were independent, but once they come into that marriage relationship, they become, as it were, a single unit and function as one person. And the implication of that is it's permanent. It's indissoluble until death separates it.

Now, that being the case, that a man and a woman joined in marriage become, in effect, one person, you can see how unnatural divorce is. Seeking a divorce to solve marital irritation is like a man cutting off an arm to cure a hangnail. That's unnatural. Well, so it is with divorce. They're like one person. So to separate can't be done easily. We can see that from the design of marriage, and I think that's the Lord's point in going back to Genesis chapters 1 and 2. But the permanence of the marriage relationship is not only implied from creation but it has behind it God's authority.

As the Lord states in verse 9: What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate. In other words, marriage is a divine institution. It's God who joined Adam and Eve together. He was, as it were, the one who officiated at that original marriage ceremony, and I think our Lord's sense here is that that pertains to every marriage down through ages. It has that seal of approval upon it from God, it is His institution, and it is not to be violated. It's not man's institution. It's not ours to do with as we wish. It's not some contract of temporary convenience. It's not some social contract that developed

over the centuries as society developed and society can then develop beyond it into some new kind of structure. That's not the case at all.

This is a relationship, a union designed by God, instituted before sin ever entered into the picture, and that shows how wrong it is to violate this union. It's God's institution, not ours. To do so, to divorce, is to put asunder what God has joined together. And that's, again, underscored by the expression "joined together." Literally, it means something like "yoked together" and conveys the idea of a team carrying out God's plan for humanity, a plan that can only be carried out within this institution that He has established. That's the design. A union of yoking together two people for the purpose of carrying out God's plan. A plan in part – we don't have time to explore it in all of its detail, but in part it is being fruitful and filling the earth. That's what the Lord commands them to do in Genesis 1:28.

The propagation of the race is dependent upon the marriage union, and the nurture of the race, at least ideally, and certainly the nurture of the redeemed race, the people of God, is dependent on marriage's permanence. Within the context of marriage and family, children are to be trained and instructed in the admonition of and the instruction of the Lord. This is what Moses instructed Israel to do in Deuteronomy chapter 6. Referring to all of the commands and the instruction that he had given to them and would give to them, he says in verse 7 you shall teach them diligently all these things that He has said and all that would be said and all that would be added as revelation progressed, teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk to them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up and in all aspects of your life, you're to be teaching your children the things of God. Spending your life doing that.

Now, how can a father do that when he is divorced from his wife and children? Divorce destroys that purpose of marriage as well as others. It's that serious. So the Lord issues the command, what God has joined together, let no man separate. To do that by divorce is, as

John Murray puts it, "the breaking of a seal which has been engraven by the hand of God." It's a serious violation and one, I think, that implies penalty. What's the penalty? Well, the Lord doesn't say but the implication is there and it's not hard to think of a number of tragic consequences that follow from the breakup of a marriage.

Apart from the deep scars that it leaves upon the souls of the husband and wife who have been knit together and have been wrenched apart because of divorce, if there are children involved, it affects them deeply. Causes alienation between parents and children. Causes all kinds of effects upon them, which they then pass on to society as a whole, so a great deal of trouble comes from divorce. Marriage is not an institution to take lightly. It was designed to be a permanent relationship. It was instituted by God.

So just a word to young people who probably haven't thought a great deal about marriage, you're just thinking maybe about dating here in a few years or some of you older people who are still single, so much we can say on this that should be said to you and time would fail me, the author of Hebrews says, if I pursue that, but realize this, that this is such a serious relationship that you must choose well your partner, the partner with whom you will be yoked together, who you will enter into a sacred purpose, a sacred ministry together. It's a lifelong purpose, a lifelong relationship, and should be looked upon as that.

So the partner that you choose should be one who is united with you in the faith. Don't become unequally yoked. There can be no greater impediment to spiritual growth than that. God can bless, even in those relationships, and He does, but so much pain, so much difficulty, so much sorrow would be avoided if one takes seriously a relationship that he or she enters into with another person. Go back to that illustration for a moment about the man who's unhappy in his relationship. Well, to avoid that – and that will follow, I don't mean to treat things lightly by saying that it can be overcome. It can be but it's a struggle.

So much of that can be avoided if one is very cautious and conscientious about who one spends time with in a dating relationship and what you're looking for in a husband or a wife. Look for one who is a Christian, who is interested in spiritual things, and going in the same direction you are, and you will avoid a life of sorrow if you do that.

So to the question of the Pharisees, is it lawful for a husband to divorce a wife, the Lord answers: What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. No response from the Pharisees is recorded. Instead, we read in verse 10 that the Lord and his disciples went into a house where the disciples began questioning Him about this again. From Matthew's account of this incident in Matthew 19, it seems that the disciples were inclined toward the lax view of Hillel on divorce, and so the Lord's teaching is very strict and they're puzzled by it and from their comments, a little discouraged by it.

So they want some clarification on this issue, and the Lord was straightforward with them: Divorce and remarriage by a husband and wife is adultery – verses 11 and 12 – and He said to them: Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her, and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery. Now, does this mean that there is no basis for divorce and remarriage? On the surface, it would seem that that's what the Lord is teaching here. But it's necessary to remember, to realize, that Mark doesn't record everything that the Lord says on this subject.

The emphasis of our Lord's words, as Mark records them, is on the abrogation, on the cancellation of the provisions in the Mosaic law which permitted divorce due to people's hardness of heart. The Lord removed all of that. In other words, He was removing the grounds for easy divorce, for divorce for any and every reason, which was so common in that day and which is so common in our own day. Today, husbands don't go to the judge and sue for divorce on the basis of the fact that his wife burned his waffle. Today, the husband claims



incompatibility, just "we don't get along," "we made a mistake," or "we've changed over the years," we've grown apart but Christ disallows any such grounds for divorce.

What He's saying here is such divorce is invalid and when it takes place, it's not a real divorce. Yeah, it may be legitimate in the eyes of the state, but what our Lord is saying is in the eyes of God, it is not legitimate, it is not valid. As a result, when remarriage takes place under those conditions, it's an adulterous relationship because the original marriage has not been dissolved. What Mark doesn't record is the exceptive clause found in Matthew 19:9 where the Lord does state that there is a legitimate basis for divorce. He says that "while Moses permitted you to divorce your wives, I say to you whoever divorces his wife except for immorality and marries another, commits adultery."

So divorce and remarriage constitutes adultery except when that divorce has taken place because of immorality, because of infidelity, because of adultery. That's the exception. That's a change in the law. The Mosaic law required death for adultery. Christ allows divorce as the penalty for adultery. Now, I think at first glance, that might appear to us that in changing the penalty for divorce from death – or rather the penalty for adultery from death to divorce, the Lord was lessening the severity of that sin of adultery, but that's not so. He was showing that adultery is so severe, so grave a sin, that it dissolves a union that was intended by God to be indissoluble. Adultery is that serious and it's grounds for divorce.

Later, Paul adds a second basis for divorce in 1 Corinthians 7:15, that of desertion. So those are the two bases for divorce and the implication is that when divorce is legitimate, remarriage is permitted. So in certain cases, divorce is an option but it's not a requirement, and I think we need to underscore that point. The Lord and the apostles do not command divorce; they simply permit it in certain cases. The fact still remains that marriage was designed to be a permanent

relationship and God hates divorce. But this still leaves with some questions, many questions, as a matter of fact.

For example, what about a couple that has divorced without proper grounds due, say, to incompatibility and then remarry, both of them are remarried? Now, the Lord says that remarriage under such circumstances is adulterous. Does that mean the second marriage is invalid? That it constitutes a continuous state of adultery? Should it be terminated with a divorce? Now, these are the kinds of questions that come up because the Scriptures don't directly address them. And yet we ask them because they're very real situations. So how do we deal with them?

Well, John Murray, the late professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, made a good attempt to do this, to apply the principles of Scripture to such situations, and I think he made a successful attempt at it. He wrote a very helpful little book entitled *Divorce* in which he carefully and thoroughly examined each of the relevant passages of the Scripture on this subject and then at the end, he takes up ten cases, such as the one that I've suggested, and seeks to apply the principles of Scripture to them.

Essentially, he answers the question this way: A second marriage, though entered into illegitimately, is nevertheless a real marriage and should not be dissolved with a second divorce. You don't correct a sin with another sin. And while the act of remarriage under those conditions constitutes an act of adultery, it's not perpetual adultery because by marrying a second time, the original marriage is broken and adultery then ceases to pertain, ceases to continue. It's an adulterous act to begin with but it's not to be considered a continuous adulterous relationship.

Now, these are hard questions to answer and he deals with many more than that, but that answer and answers such as that should not distract from the fact that divorce and remarriage under such conditions, it's a sin, and it carries great guilt, it carries shame, and it carries continuing consequences throughout one's life. The Lord is

very clear that breaking up a marriage is an abomination. But as William Hendriksen writes in his commentary: "That same uncompromising Lord is also the merciful Savior who comforts the heart of the penitent sinner by saying, 'Go and from now on, sin no more.'"

Many situations brought on by sin can't be reversed – and that's unfortunate, but it's the reality – and yet the grace of God can touch even those situations and give new beginning. And all of us, even in the best of marriages, need the grace of God. We need it constantly and we need it to keep us from failing and from falling into temptation. We need it to enable us to serve one another because we're to be doing that. To go back to the previous passage in the previous lesson, that's where greatness lies, in serving one another. And husbands, though they have the preeminence of authority, are to be serving their wives and wives are to be gladly serving their husbands, and that's how we maintain our marriages, and so we need the grace of God to be able to do that and to not only be able to endure in our marriages or have our marriages endure but to prosper and to be a great example to others.

Last week I was visiting with a friend. We were discussing a variety of things and the discussion turned to the subject of marriage, and he made the statement, "I don't think there is anything that Satan attacks more than the family." And I believe that's true. That's how it all began in the garden, he attacked the first family and as a result, there has been strife in families ever since. "Your desire shall be for your husband," the Lord told Eve, "and he shall rule over you." Now, that's describing a relationship of contention in a fallen world. That's what's going to happen in marriages, He says, as a result of this sin. There's going to be conflict. You're going to desire to rule; he's going to rule over you.

I don't think I'm being an alarmist to say that Satan is after your marriage, and the flesh is weak. If he can destroy a Christian marriage and family, he can destroy a Christian testimony and cause a

world of pain to everyone involved, and so it's incumbent upon us in this day of divorce, this day in which the family is under siege, to heed the words of the apostle: Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. Wives, be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord. Takes the desire to please the Lord. That takes a desire to have a good and healthy marriage, and it takes constant effort.

And we can only do that with the help of the Holy Spirit. So my prayer for each of us, and your prayer for each of us should be, may God help us each to do that, to look to the Lord daily for help in this area.

If you're here this morning and you don't know Christ as Savior, you may have a good marriage. In fact, you may have a marriage that in many ways outshines many Christian marriages. But if you're outside of Christ, you're outside of the greatest of marriages, the ultimate marriage, that of Christ and His church. The church is Christ's bride and He is faithful to His bride. He has bought us for Himself like Hosea bought Gomer for himself out of harlotry and out of slavery, but Christ bought us, not with perishable things like silver or gold but with precious blood as a lamb unblemished, with His own blood, His own death, and having redeemed us, He has brought us into a relationship with Him that is eternal, a relationship from which He will never divorce us.

We prove unfaithful to Him continually and yet He will never divorce us from Himself. We are in a relationship from which we cannot be severed, even by death itself. In fact, death for us becomes the gateway into the great unspeakable joys of that relationship in all of its fullness.

So I ask you: Have you been redeemed? You have if you've believed. And if you have not believed, you can know that you've been purchased by Christ, that He is your Savior, by simply believing in Him, in the one who died for your sins and trusting in Him. May God help you to do that, to trust in Christ, whom to know is life

eternal, and may God help each of us to live lives of obedience to Him, seeking to bring glory to Him, and in that effort, we will truly be happy. May God bless us each now. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for the difficult teaching that we have considered – difficult, at least, in our day when infidelity is so common, when selfishness is rampant. Of course, it's always been that way to one degree or another. That's the heart of fallen man. And yet we know it should not be that way in the church, and yet so often it is. We confess that sin. And we pray, Father, for grace, that you would help us to be men and women who strive to have exemplary marriages, marriages that are pleasing to you, marriages that present a beautiful picture to the world of your relationship with us, of the relationship of Christ and His church, His bride.

We look forward to that wedding feast to come. We know that it will come and perhaps come soon, when your Son returns, and we look forward to that day. Help us to live in light of that. Help us to live lives of obedience now. We pray particularly for those who may be contemplating divorce. We pray that you'd change their hearts. We pray for those who are living in very difficult marriages. We pray that you'd give patience. We pray that you would give grace, that they might live obediently to you and in a way that brings glory to you and in an way that's sanctifying to them.

And we pray for those who have good marriages. May they stay that way and may they strive to make them even better. These are works of your grace, Father, that only you can perform. We pray that you would do it, pray these things in our Savior's name. Amen.