

December 7, 2025

GOD'S INTENT FOR MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN

Mark 10:1-16

*(1 of 15 in a series through Mark 10-16)*

It's hard to imagine topics over which society is more confused than that of sexuality, marriage, and children. Until what felt about five minutes ago historically, all of human history acknowledged that there were two genders, male and female, and that one's gender was identical to one's biological sex. Yet, even something as basic and clear as that has been fought against by our confused and rebellious culture. And that's only one of the areas in which society has seemingly gone mad.

We also live in a time in which people want to define marriage as something that can exist between a man and man or woman and woman or, I guess, whatever your mind can imagine. Our supreme court, in the Obergefell decision of 2015, sadly, legalized this oddity, attempting to define marriage in this way that, again, no one seems to have attempted until recent times. For this reason, confessions of faith for churches like ours have had to adopt statements that simply weren't necessary in previous times, declaring that gender is tied to one's biological sex and that marriage is only between a man and a woman. And we've not even stepped into the reality that marriages can be legally dissolved without any cause whatsoever with so-called "no fault" divorces.

Yet the confusion of our society doesn't even stop there. We also live in a time when children are thought of as those who can be discarded. Now, sadly, this isn't exceptional in history, but it is nonetheless tragic. We murder our children in the womb, sanitizing this murderous act by calling it "reproductive health," which hides the savage nature of ripping apart our children limb from limb or chemically snuffing out their lives through the taking of a pill that will kill them. Even the legalization of so-called homosexual marriage shows our willingness to discard the needs of children. Not only were the needs of a child to have a father and a mother not brought up in the court's Obergefell written decision, the needs of children are almost never considered in such matters. The desires of selfish adults must trump all else. And children, of all people, have seemed to be the target of those in our communities wanting to push for so-called "transitioning" of one's gender. Again, society is a wreck on these issues of sexuality, marriage, and children.

So, what do we do? Well, a couple of things. First, and most importantly, the church must be a picture of a counterculture. In other words, individuals should be able to look at the church and see a people who aren't living out this confusion reflected in society but a model of something altogether different—a model of what God prescribes for us. And then, as we seek to love our neighbors as ourselves as their fellow citizens, we can vote and seek the implementation of laws that would protect our neighbors from the sinful and harmful realities that culture is pushing itself toward in its march toward self-destruction.

But before doing either of those things, it's necessary for us to understand God's ideal in regard to marriage and children. What does the Bible say about these things, about God's intention for marriage, what divorce is and does, and why children are so valuable to us? And that's what I want us to see this morning from Mark 10:1-16, where Jesus addresses these issues.

So, first, let me set the stage so that we understand what causes Jesus to begin to address these issues of marriage and children. And we'll start with the issue of marriage. What sets off this conversation is that Mark tells us that the Pharisees came up to Jesus in order to *test* him by asking him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" (v. 2).

Now, our first response might be to say that this doesn't sound like a test. After all, many in history have asked that question. But let me explain why it's a test. First, they knew that Moses had given regulations about divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Therefore, if Jesus were to contradict Moses somehow, that would be one way they could discredit Jesus—pit him as one contradicting Moses. Second, there were different schools of thought among the Jewish teachers. They all taught that there were certain situations in which divorce was permissible. Some taught it was only in a situation where one's spouse had committed adultery while others taught that one could divorce his or her spouse for basically anything that was displeasing—even things like failing to find one's spouse attractive any more or thinking they're not a good cook. Therefore, if Jesus sided with one of these schools over the other, then at best, he was condemning the view of some Jewish teachers and, thus, creating more enemies for himself. And if the Pharisees can create more enemies for Jesus, they'd see that as a good thing. Finally, if you'll remember, Herod—and especially his wife Herodias—had imprisoned John and later beheaded him. And what was John's crime? He told Herod that it was unlawful to marry his brother's wife. Consequently, were Jesus to agree with John in saying that Herod had not been allowed to divorce his wife and Herodias wasn't allowed to divorce her husband so that the two of them could marry, then Jesus might suffer the same fate as John. In other words, this question provided all sorts of landmines for Jesus. That's why Mark tells us that they were asking this simply to test him.

But what Jesus does is that he doesn't simply answer their question as presented to him but begins with something more basic. He responds by pointing to God's ideal, intention, and design for marriage from the beginning. And if you and I are going to think rightly about these issues, then we need to start there as well. And what Jesus shows with his answer is that God's ideal for marriage is that a man and a woman would be united for life.

### **God's ideal for marriage is that a man and a woman would be united for life**

Jesus first answers by pointing them to Moses and what he commanded, but they respond by noting, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away" (v. 4). And then Jesus counters, saying, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall

become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (vv. 5-9).

What Jesus does with this answer is he says, "Let's pause the divorce question for a second and look at what God's ideal is, what was God's intention in marriage. Then we can tackle issues of divorce." And so I want to skip verse 5 for a second and see what Jesus does before tackling the issue of divorce. In order to show God's ideal for marriage, Jesus quotes two texts from Genesis. First, Jesus quotes from Genesis 1:27, noting that God made man male and female.

Why note this? Well, it's clear from Jesus starting there that one of the key reasons God made two sexes—male and female—is so that they might be united in marriage. Thus, we see not only that gender is part of the goodness of God's creation and not to be rebelled against but also that marriage is exclusively something that can be experienced between a man and a woman. To call something homosexual marriage is like saying a "square circle" or "married bachelor." It's definitionally impossible. Marriage by definition is between a man and a woman.

Second, Jesus quotes from Genesis 2:24 about a man leaving his father and mother and being joined to his wife so that the two become one flesh. By quoting this, Jesus is emphasizing that God's intention from the beginning is that when a man and a woman are joined together in marriage, it should be for life. And because this union involves the very work of God, man should never separate this united, married couple. That is God's ideal, design, and intention for marriage, and it has been that way from the beginning.

That must be our starting place, our agreed upon understanding of marriage in all our conversations about these topics. To start a conversation about marriage by talking about divorce would be like walking into a bank to get a loan, and the first thing you ask is, "Under what circumstances can I default in paying back this loan without it hurting my credit too bad?" That tells the banker not only that he probably shouldn't loan you the money, but it raises the issue of if you really have an understanding of how a loan is supposed to work and benefit both parties.

We need to recognize that same thing regarding marriage. God didn't create marriage with the idea that it could or would be dissolved by divorce. He created marriage so that it could be experienced by a husband and wife together for the entirety of their lives. This needs to be understood by every believer. We should never pursue marriage even contemplating the idea of divorce. This doesn't mean divorce will never happen, but to introduce the thoughts into our minds as we consider what marriage is, is to reveal we've not recognized God's ideal for marriage. There's a reason we don't say in wedding ceremonies, "Now if you don't carry out these vows." We're aiming for God's ideal and should never set our sights on anything less.

We want to hold up what should be ideal and, frankly, standard among believers. We get married, remain faithful, and are bound as husband and wife until one of us dies. That's is God's design, and that should be the expected standard among us. And let me say that I'm thankful that this is the culture that has been created in our church community. It doesn't mean we haven't seen unfaithfulness and divorce. Sadly, we have. But it's been by far the exception, not

the rule. And when it occurs, we call out the unfaithfulness as sin and if divorce is done without biblical grounds, we identify that as sin as well. And that's a gift to our children, who can grow up in this community seeing, expecting, and pursuing God's ideal, which is for one man and one woman to be united in marriage for life.

But Jesus doesn't ignore what Moses wrote in the law when he gave regulations for what must take place when a divorce occurs. What Jesus makes clear, however, is that Moses wrote what he wrote because he was writing in a world where people harden their hearts in sin. In other words, we can say this: divorce came about and exists because of sin.

### **Divorce came about and exists because of sin**

Now, don't hear me say that divorce is always and necessarily sin. I'm not saying that, and I'll say more about that later. If that were the case, then God himself would be indicted as he sent Israel away with a decree of divorce after her adultery against him (Jeremiah 3:8). So, again, I'm not saying that to divorce is always sin. But I am saying that divorce came about and exists because of sin. Let me explain.

First, note what Jesus says about what Moses wrote. He tells the Pharisees about Moses, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment" (v. 5). Okay, what does that mean? Well, in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 Moses gave instructions requiring a man who was putting his wife away to give her a certificate of divorce. The idea seems to be a protection for the woman. You can imagine, for example, if a woman were away from her husband and her home, others might think ill of her. Perhaps they're tempted to whisper, "Why has she abandoned her family?" Well, in cases like this, she could produce the certificate of divorce, showing that she's not abandoned her husband but is actually the victim in this case, having been put away by him. And so, for those kinds of reasons, a certificate of divorce was a necessary protection.

However, some might read that and think that Moses was saying, "As long as you give her a certificate of divorce, putting away your wife is fine and good option." And here's where Jesus steps in to correct that, saying that the reason Moses wrote this command about giving a certificate of divorce was because of the hardness of heart of the people. But how does that work? Well, I think I can explain it with an illustration I used back when I preached Matthew 19.

Imagine that I said to my young kids, "I'm going out for a bit to take a jog around the neighborhood. Stay in the house, keep the doors locked, don't go anywhere for the next half hour, and you'll be safe. Then I'll be back." Then, about twenty-five minutes later, as I'm almost back to the house, I get a call from my son saying, "Dad, I left the house. I took our only car. And now I'm about fifteen miles away from the house, I've run out of gas, I can't get back to the house, and I know that without the car, you can't come get me. However, I think I am close enough that I can walk to a friend's house and stay there for the night." And I say, after expressing my frustration with my son's actions, "Yes, walk over to your friend's house, ring the

doorbell, talk to his parents, explain the situation, see if they're okay housing you for the night, and, if so, just stay there."

Could you imagine someone hearing that story and concluding, "Based on what Lee said, he wanted his son to have a sleepover at his friend's house"? No, obviously that's not what I wanted. I made my desires clear by telling my son not to leave the house. Allowing him to stay at a friend's house was only a concession in light of an already bad situation where rebellion and sin (because of his hardness of heart) had already entered the picture. This is what Jesus is saying about Moses' command regarding issuing a certificate of divorce if you've put your wife away. It's an attempt to make the best of a situation where hard-hearted sin has already wreaked havoc.

That is why we can say that divorce came about and exists because of sin. If we never sinned, the concept of divorce would not exist. It's not what God intended when he established marriage. Again, this is not to say that the act of divorce is always sinful, but it is to say that where divorce takes place sin has first taken place. And that leads to Jesus' next statement on the issue where Jesus declares that divorcing one's spouse without biblical grounds and remarrying is an act of adultery.

### **Divorcing one's spouse without biblical grounds and remarrying is an act of adultery**

In verse 10 we're told that after Jesus' discussion with the Pharisees, the disciples brought up the conversation again with Jesus, wanting to know more about what he'd said about marriage and divorce. And Jesus said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery" (vv. 11-12).

In other words, what Jesus is showing here is that merely giving one's spouse a certificate of divorce doesn't necessarily free you to go and marry someone else. If a man were married but wanted to be with another woman, and so he divorced his wife, and then went and married that other woman, he committed adultery the first time he was intimate with her. That's what Jesus is saying. The man may object by noting that he divorced his wife first. But Jesus is saying that it doesn't work like that. The man who pretends he can simply absolve his marital commitments to his wife by giving her a certificate of divorce and is intimate with another woman is acting no differently than the man who simply cheats on his wife in an act of adultery. It's the same thing. And if a woman does this same thing, she too is committing adultery.

Now, though they're not mentioned here, we know that there are exceptions for this. There are biblical grounds for divorce, as taught in Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7. In Matthew 19, we're taught that if one's spouse is unfaithful and commits adultery, then the innocent spouse is allowed to divorce his or her spouse, and then they are free to remarry. In that case, the act of adultery itself breaks the marriage covenant, freeing the innocent party to divorce his or her spouse and be free to remarry (again, as the Lord does with Israel). Also, if a believer is married to an unbeliever, and the unbeliever no longer wants to be married, Paul tells the believing

partner that divorce is permissible in that case, and where one is free, he or she may also remarry. To divorce and remarry in those cases isn't to commit adultery. But to divorce without biblical grounds and marry another is simply to commit adultery. And, finally, Jesus teaches us that children are a gift from God, picturing for us how we must come to God.

### **Children are a gift from God, picturing for us how we must come to God**

In verse 13 we read that parents were bringing their children to Jesus in order that he might lay his hands on them and bless them. And the disciples' response was to rebuke those parents for bringing their children to Jesus. Why?

Well, we're not told, but the idea most likely would have been that they're trying to protect Jesus from spending time on those who were of such little value. We've already noted this in our study through Mark's gospel that children were regarded as the lowest in in society, even lower than slaves. They were seen as unable to contribute anything until they matured in understanding and in their physical capabilities. Until then, they're simply helpless, needy, dependent, and necessarily relying on and trusting those who knew better than them. So, again, you can see why it'd be reasonable to think that the disciples were doing Jesus a favor. But, interestingly, Jesus doesn't thank them for keeping these lowlifes away from him. Rather, Mark tells us that he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it," and then he laid his hands on the children and blessed them" (vv. 14-16).

Now, let's not misunderstand what Jesus says. He's not saying that children are automatically saved simply because they're children. After all, every adult was once a child, and not everyone is saved. He didn't say, "To *these* belong the kingdom of God," but "To *such* belongs the kingdom of God." That is to say, the kingdom belongs to individuals who become *like* children.

Here's what Jesus is saying. As we look at children and see their helplessness, need, inability, and dependence that requires them to trust, lean on, and follow others, they are a picture to us of what we must become like in order to enter the kingdom. We cannot be saved by coming to Christ with a heart that says, "I have no need." We must realize that we are utterly helpless apart from him. That is why Jesus says that it is those who are poor in spirit (that is, those who understand they're spiritually bankrupt) who will inherit the kingdom. And children are a picture of that.

Now, the first century world may have been different from ours in a number of ways, but in this one we're alike. We're tempted to despise weakness, and children, especially young children, are a picture of that. But what a gift they are to us. Just as we prize marriage as a picture of the relationship between Christ and his church, so children are a picture to us of what we must be like to come to God.

Have you ever wondered why the Lord lets us spend so much of our lives as humans being helpless? I mean, how much better would it be to bear children who within a week or so were ready to help you mow, rake leaves, or take the garbage out? And yet, they come into the world requiring everything of you. And yet, that is by design because it's a reminder to us to come to Jesus like that—helpless and needy. Thank God for his gift of children. The second I feel capable, wise, and self-sufficient, I need to be around little ones again, who are a gracious picture of what I must be toward my Lord.

The world in rebellion against God despises biblical sexuality, marriage, and children. And yet our Lord here shows us what the church must be—a people who marry and are faithful and committed to one another for life and who treasure children as living embodiments of what our hearts must be before our Lord. Therefore, let's renew our commitment to live counter-cultural and picture to the Lord the relationship of Christ and his church in our marriages and allow our little ones to be a constant reminder of our need to approach the Lord in poverty of spirit. And let's make that commitment visible by coming to the table this morning. Amen.