

Making Love to Hard Hearts

Series: Gender

Mar 10:1-12

Use RSV

To The Village Church, 02/12/2006

Main Idea: The gender-intensive, permanent bond of marriage teaches us the love of Christ for His bride, so marry well and prevent divorce.

Meditation:

O God, make us hungry to learn what your love makes you so ardent to teach!

--Augustine

Post-Sermon Song Theme: The deep, sweet love of Jesus

Benediction:

May the permanence of Christ's love secure you in the midst of any and all difficulty.

Charge:

Go forth to proclaim to your city, by your marriages and your esteem of marriage, the undying love of your Saviour.

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I. Jesus does the Ethics of Marriage and Divorce

A. On the road to Jerusalem

1. We are walking with Jesus, now, toward Jerusalem. And it is a distinct phase of His ministry. In chapters 9 and 10 of this gospel we are reading, Mark describes Jesus physical journey with the disciples to Jerusalem. But, because He is Teacher, in these two chapters Jesus is also bringing His disciples on a spiritual journey, to prepare them spiritually for Jerusalem.
2. The heart of this journey is learning what the word “Christ” means. In many different ways, through sundry issues, He is teaching them this same thing over and over. Jesus was on a mission, He keeps telling them, to go to Jerusalem to die. And all these widely separated topics of instruction funnel into the meaning of that mission, even this passage we are reading today.
3. There’s a word in v1, “ei, vwqa”, a verb from which we get our word, “ethics”. It doesn’t mean anything, but its funny coincidence because the passage is a ethical teaching for society. The best accounts of His life that we have tell us that Jesus customarily taught ethics to people. He addressed issues relevant to larger society. A view of Christ that only has Him concerned with private spirituality is erroneous.
4. **V1--**Entering Judea, the big time. It seems to me that, by the teaching that takes place in this chapter, that the people in this part of the country are much more engaged with cultural issues, larger issues of society.

B. A hot social topic

1. Now, the debate of this passage about divorce is, 2000 years later, occurring in our lives.
2. [JUDITH S. KAYE](#), the chief judge of New York, this very week praised a report calling for no-fault divorce in our state. She said that no-fault divorces would mean that spouses "don't have to invent charges against each other."
 - She sees how these things get ugly when they play out, but she thinks that the solution is to give someone an ability to divorce a spouse with no grounds whatsoever:
 - "[Currently] Divorce takes much too long and costs much too much— too much money, too much agony, too hard on the children."
 - But this solution, making divorce easier, inevitably will make more divorces.
3. What strikes me is that this hot social topic, about what should constitute grounds for divorce and how easy it should be, is not new. **V2** shows that divorce was, even then, a hot topic. It is this subject that the Pharisees think they can use to trip Jesus up.

4. Why? Because it was controversial. Some rabbis, like Hillel (late first century B.C.)¹ or Joshua Ben Sira² (c. 200BC), taught that a man could divorce his wife for being annoying, or burning his dinner, so long as he gave her a certificate of divorce.
5. Other Rabbis, such as Shammai, taught that divorce could only be legitimate for adultery.
6. They weren't too far,³ now from where John the Baptist had conducted his ministry. They were going South, to the region called Perea, "beyond Jordan." "Beyond Jordan" is where John is described to have baptized.⁴ And John, we may recall that Mark told us, was beheaded over this very issue of divorce and remarriage, that is, his teaching about it which offended Herodias, who had divorced Phillip and married Herod Antipas. John's position led to his execution.⁵ And here they were entering the same geographical region.
7. So this was not only a controversial subject, in these parts, it was dangerous. It was a cunning move by the Pharisees to see if Jesus could hang Himself on this topic.

C. Moses made laws for hardness of hearts

1. So Jesus does ethics.
2. In **v4**, The Pharisees are referring to **Deu 24:1-3**.
 - Very confusing Hebrew sentence, that they were interpreting to condone divorce.
 - Principle is more about defiling a woman twice (so thinks Jeremiah in Jer 3:1)
 - But it raised the question as to whether Moses allowed it...
3. There are other laws about other things that mention divorced people (Lev 21:7, Lev 21:14, Lev 22:13, Num 30:9, Isa 50:1 "Where is your certificate of Divorce?"). It could make it seem that divorce was to be expected. For instance, one law said that a priest couldn't marry a divorced woman. So did that mean that Moses was allowing divorce as a regular practice in the society of Israel?
4. But Jesus teaches that Moses tolerated divorce. He neither authorized it nor sanctioned it. It was neither commanded nor condoned in the passage they quote.
5. Currently there are laws regulating murder. They are not a tacit approval of murder.

¹ Lane, 353.

² Lane, 355.

³ The Appendix, "Establishing the Text," v1, explains where I think that they were.

⁴ Joh 1:28, Joh 3:26.

⁵ Mar 6:17-19.

6. Much of the OT Law falls in the category of making this kind of provision. **v5**- Jesus says that Moses wrote it for their hardness of heart. Certain things written in the law are not set in stone, so to speak, but there to help coach the Israelites into a new way of life from their old life.

D. The real truth of Moses from further back

1. Jesus does not escape his entrappers by equivocating. And this is typical. He doesn't evade these traps by sitting on a fence. Instead, what He often does is speak something that rings in peoples' ears because it goes underneath the trap and gets at truth, and makes people forget what the trap was to begin with. He is quite definite here about divorce. What does He do?
2. **V3** –Jesus acknowledges the Law. Christ speaks as if Moses gave us the mind of God. But Jesus says to the Pharisees, “You didn't go far enough into Moses.” You didn't take all of Moses teaching to understand the law of Deu 24. The real truth of Moses comes from further back in his writings. In Genesis.
3. In fact, Jesus is saying, you need to understand marriage to make a judgment about divorce.

So let's look at Jesus' teaching on what marriage is in **vv6-9**.

II. The Two Matters of Marriage

We find two principles: Two matters of marriage, one in vv6-7 and the other in vv8-9. What matters in marriage? We find that they are Gender and Permanence. Let's talk about them.

A. vv6-7-Gender matters in marriage

1. Not popular. Not popular to pay attention to gender in marriage. Marriage today is supposed to be symmetrical. In fact, increasingly many feel that it doesn't even matter if there are different genders involved.
2. But to Jesus, gender matters: He goes out of His way to bring two scriptures together: In answering the question, what marriage is for, He first quotes **Gen 1:27**-“God created man in His own image, Male and Female created He them.” And then jumps a chapter and quotes **Gen 2:24** “For this reason a man shall leave His father and mother...” Why start in Gen 1:27 if the whole point were in Gen 2:24?
 - Because gender is significant to the meaning of marriage. Hence, He says, “therefore” two people get married.
 - Jesus is in fact using a shorthand, because the second verse He quotes follows a story about gender in Gen 2. So by making the “therefore” refer to Gen 1:27 as He does, He is respecting the meaning of the original text, but just saying it succinctly.
3. Now, in a genderless marriage, a marriage where gender is downplayed or even done away with, there may be care. There may be concern. There may be companionship. Of course. There may be many helpful things in such a relationship.
4. There may be love. Sure. But Jesus is teaching that “love”, as it is commonly understood, does not a full marriage make. Or maybe put it this way, you don't get a full love in a genderless marriage.
5. But you know, if what Jesus says is true, ultimately, a genderless marriage is boring. There may be a physical intimacy which gives a certain amount of satisfaction. There will be a certain amount of pleasure. But you'll never get as hot as you could. That is why the bedroom is a place where people slip back into gender roles.
6. It's like doing the bump. Remember that dance? Do you know why people don't do the Bump anymore? Because it was boring. It was a unisex dance.
7. This may be why one of the last bastions of our culture that affirm gender is formal dancing. And, it is a real point of controversy now about whether same sex couples are allowed to enter competitions. The formal dance culture is really resisting because it limits the ideas of the dance.

8. But Jesus is teaching here that an asymmetry in marriage, that a gendered marriage, makes a fuller-bodied and so less limited, relationship of intimacy:
 - There is a way they behave toward one another that is different:
 - There is a determined dieing to one's self in the husband and a corresponding surrender of prerogative in the wife.
 - There is a pro-activity in the husband for the wife's benefit and a corresponding filling in what the husband lacks in the wife.
 - More, but gender matters.

B. Equality in Gender

1. Now Jesus is teaching here that there is certainly also a symmetry in aspects of the marriage relationship, born of the sex's equality before God. You can see it in
 - **V11** –Contrary to the Rabbinic teaching of the time, which seemed to hold that adultery was only an offence that could be committed against a man, or against God, Jesus asserts that it could be an offence “against” the wife.
 - And **v12**, Jesus is asserting there is a symmetry of offence in divorce. The one divorcing is wronging the other, be it man or woman.
 - In both these verses, He was elevating the status of the wife to the level of the husband.⁶ And it is another instance of how Christianity raised the status of women in the world.
2. So we want to celebrate, with Jesus, the equality of the genders. Those things flow right out of the Biblical understanding of men and women's full equality before God: “He created them in God's image, male and female.”
3. But there is also an asymmetry. This is why virtually all of the NT instruction on marriage is gender-intense.
4. (Women need to be careful here. You teach men that they are no different from women, and they will stop asking you out on dates.)
- 5.

⁶ Lane, 357, even suggests, from TWNT, that a Jewish husband of that time could not be said to commit adultery against his wife, only against another husband. Is this so? Hendricksen, 380, quotes Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* XV.259, to that effect.

C. Vv8-9-Permanence matters in marriage

1. #2 Principle, in vv8-9, about marriage is its permanence. Permanence matters in marriage.
2. v8—As Jesus puts it, a man and woman become “one flesh.” A husband and wife become one unit in mysterious ways.
3. When the Scripture says that a man shall “cleave” to his wife, it is using a covenantal term used elsewhere to express the way the Israelites were to cleave, with continual loyalty, to the Lord.⁷
 - a. The genders lock. And there is no key to unlock this lock. It is like child window-guards in New York upper story apartments. Once they are installed, there are no screw drivers to get them out.
 - b. v9 Jesus creates a beautiful way of saying it. Jesus encourages us to understand our marriage as something God has ordained. He is pleased to have made it so. We might think that it was our idea, but Jesus says, don’t look at it that way.
4. This lends a permanence to the operation.
5. Now, to some of us, especially those with a divorce in our past, or to those with a real messed up marriage—and we are not untouched by these tragedies at TVC—these words don’t carry a beauty but a harshness. In light of the opposite cultural attitude, Jesus sounds not only too strict, but needlessly harsh.

D. Exceptions to the permanence of marriage

1. There are grounds to recognize that a marriage has been broken, and one of the parties is no longer bound. We need to understand that they are implied.⁸
 - Mat 5:32, Mat 19:9 –Jesus talks about the exception of adultery,
 - 1Co 7:15 The apostle Paul mentions another situation where divorce would be allowed and recognized.
 - And these would permit remarriage
2. Mark doesn’t mention them in recording Jesus’ discourse because they are extreme,⁹ and he would not distract from the main teaching,

⁷ Deu 10:20, Deu 11:22, Deu 13:4, Deu 30:20, Jos 22:5, Jos 23:8.

⁸ See Appendix on implied exceptions.

⁹ You could say that Mark was taking them for granted. Both pagan and Jewish culture took adultery as a ground for divorce.

3. But acknowledging these are a far cry from the “irreconcilable differences” clause of most contemporary divorce legislation or divorcing to make room for another woman/man.
4. And it was the same way in antiquity. Keener: No one else in antiquity spoke of divorce in such strong terms. This is confirmed by the disciples’ reaction:
 - There is this pattern of public teaching and then private consultation with the disciples¹⁰, in which they get to ask Him about things that really struck them.
 - That was pretty clear answer in vv5-9, don’t you think? Yet they want to hear it again: “Are you really saying that?”
 - Matthew makes their shock at this teaching explicit (Mat 19:10).
 - Jewish sources confirm that divorce was relatively easy to obtain.¹¹
 - Jesus’ stance on the permanence of marriage was surprising even to the disciples.
5. So gender matters and permanence matters in marriage.
6. And no amount of recasting it to make people feel like it is not a big deal is going to take away the real trauma that a divorce causes. And not just to the two partners.
 - A superb recent movie, although painful to watch, I highly recommend, for the director’s and writer’s insight into marriage relationship, is *The Squid and the Whale*. It is a superb movie.
 - But there is one scene where this Park Slope couple who are breaking up sit their two sons down to tell them about it.
 - And they naturally try to downplay to the kids the import of what is happening and the younger son bursts into tears. The older blows up at them.
 - This is classic: this Park Slope Mom says, “I don’t understand, haven’t most of your friends’ parents had a divorce?” And the teenager says, “Well, yeah....but not mine.”
7. So this is why we put so much into doing all we can to create healthy marriages here at The Village Church. Maybe you’ve picked that up, but engagement counseling here gets the full attention of both my wife and me. We give you our time and attentiveness. And some people might think that it is overkill, but maybe you haven’t walked through a divorce with someone you love. Or maybe you haven’t take these words of Jesus seriously.
8. And the Sunday School Class in a few weeks: a five week class in April.

¹⁰ Mar 4:10, Mar 7:17 display this same, “afterwards, in the house” sequence.

¹¹ PCA Digest (Position Papers), 213.

III. The Meaning of Marriage and Divorce

So we have this emphasis. But there is a deeper reason for it. Besides wanting to do everything we can to help your marriages or marriages-to-be, there is another reason The Village Church, and Jesus, have this emphasis.

A. Journey to Jerusalem: Many different ways of teaching the same thing

1. This incident demonstrates proper exegesis to us as well as how to think ethically about marriage, but it also had a deeper point. It might sound like a teaching on ethics, but it is really just another way of saying to them: “We are going to Jerusalem for Me to die for you.”
2. Jesus explained it to explain the constancy of love. The absolute commitment of marriage proclaimed His commitment to them and the reason He was going to Jerusalem, to die for them.
3. In Jerusalem God would together a Saviour and His people, which man would not be able to put asunder.

B. Making love to hard hearts

1. I don't wish to preach on issues that distract from the gospel of Jesus Christ. So I wouldn't preach on this topic except that it does affect the gospel, or rather, the gospel affects it.
2. Our condition is, as Moses found, hardness in our hearts. It wasn't just the Israelites' hearts. It is the human heart. And whereas Moses could only make laws that accommodated our hard hearts, made provision for our hard hearts, Jesus did something much greater than Moses could do:
3. Jesus made love to our hard hearts.
4. And He made love to our hard hearts in these very two marriage principles He was teaching.
5. His love led. He stood up to do what needed to be done in the mess. He walked ahead of the disciples on this road to Jerusalem, doing for them what He needed to do, going to the cross for them, dieing to His own way in order to bring them along with Him.
6. Gender, properly expressed in a husband, commemorates that willingness to initiate in love.
7. Who are His people? His bride? Those who have surrendered the prerogative of their lives to Him. In a much bigger way than a bride does in a marriage.
8. Secondly, His death was there to show:
 - that His love for His bride would last forever

- “Oh love, that will not let me go...”
 - Oh love, that nothing on earth can put asunder.
9. There is a Valentine. Whether you have a date or not this week (Valentine’s Day is 02/14), there is valentine for you to receive and to celebrate.

C. What divorce really ruins

1. So now we can see what divorce really ruins.
2. Divorce doesn’t just ruin a relationship. It ruins the ability of people to recognize what Jesus Christ promises.
3. **v11**—The way it is phrased, the divorcing husband is actually doing something *against* her.
4. A culture that increasingly accepts and supports divorce, and one that increasingly minimizes the reality of gender, will cripple the ability of people to affirm Christ’s undying love for His church.
5. What does divorce really ruin? Divorce ruins the picture that Jesus Christ died to present,
 - that God’s commitment to His people is unassailable.
 - That there is a love that would do anything to address the need of the beloved.
 - That, no matter what the difficulties, He will do whatever it takes to preserve the place of His bride. And the bride will respond in breath-taking trust.
 - That is gender. That is permanence.
6. Divorce ruins the same thing that a strong marriage makes much easier to believe: That there is love.

