

An Uncomfortable Conversation about Divorce

Sermon for Oct. 3, 2021

Today's readings:

[Genesis 2:18-25](#)

Hebrews 2:1-13 (14-18)

Mark 10:2-16

Pharisees came up and in order to test [Jesus] asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." And 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.' 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he 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." Let the Children Come to Me And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, 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 he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

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So I was reading through a book of notes that I took during some lecture, somewhere... I found this in my stack of stuff that I keep meaning to organize. But what caught my eye were these two sentences...

--All problems in human relationships have their origins in alienation.

--All solutions to these problems have their origins in acceptance or in reconciliation.

Now those are absolute statements. And I'm not sure that I agree with them 100% but on average, this seems like it might be true. Probably is true. And while the Bible doesn't phrase the problem quite so succinctly, where-in let's say, I could point to a specific Bible verse for confirmation, I think as an overarching concept, the word of God agrees with the author of the statements... that we are broken by sin and separated from the love of God, but that in Jesus Christ, our Lord has made atonement for us and has reconciled us to Himself.

The first obvious sin we see in the scriptures, after the fall, is the alienation between [Cane and his brother Abel](#). (“[God prefers YOUR sacrifice over mine.](#)”)

In the light of our texts today, and the unhappy subject they bring up, I set about trying to avoid the topic as it:

A. Doesn't apply to everybody.

And B. still affects the lives of everyone, including Christians.

But just because I want to dodge this 800 pound gorilla, it doesn't mean I can, or should.

But it was in trying to side-step the message that I rediscovered what I had written down at some point, while listening to a lecture. And maybe it helps me unlock these texts in a way that I can address them in a mixed audience of people who have been through the pain of divorce as well as those who haven't.

I won't be dealing with specifics, but with generalities. And the bigger picture of what this particular sin represents.

Let's look at our gospel reading:

Some Pharisees came and tested him. And SEE, this is a TEST they are giving him, once again trying to trap Jesus. This time, by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” It's a double bind question, or it's supposed to be...

Answer it one way...

“Yes, divorce is allowed” and they can say, “Where does God say this is permitted?”

If Jesus answers “No, this is not permitted” and they can answer “The way does Moses say that it is lawful to write a certificate of divorce?”

Jesus answers with a question of his own, pointing them to what they already know, saying...
“What did Moses command you?”

They answered him saying, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”

At which point Jesus answers their first question, explaining to them the human condition, and he puts this explanation in simple terms: “It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,”

THAT should be enough. This law is from Moses, not from God,

God's law was in effect from the beginning...

And God “made them male and female.”

There is a quote from some movie or tv show ... I've long forgotten the scene, but I recall the snarky comment that the main character said... "There is no need to state the incredibly obvious, when the merely obvious will do."

Well, these days I guess we do have to state the incredibly obvious...

God "made them male and female." That's it. End of story. There are only two sexes in the world. In spite of the cultural changes taking place in our society, there are ONLY two sexes... male and female. Men and women, girls and boys, Adam and Eve, the very foundation of human society, human family.

And it is written from God... 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

So this is God's intention. Because sexuality produces offspring, God protects that expression of love in the covenant of marriage, where it is blessed and approved. Outside of the bonds of marriage is adultery which God calls sin. It is as simple as that. When a marriage is dissolved a promise is broken and it results in sin. A sin which, at its core, Jesus identifies as the hardness of hearts.

--All problems in human relationships have their origins in alienation.

--All solutions to these problems have their origins in acceptance or in reconciliation.

Jesus is telling the Pharisees you came to me asking a question about divorce, but the real issue we are dealing with here Jesus exposes as a defect of the heart. That's where the problem begins.

Jesus is making it clear that "you are not really asking me about divorce because you really want to know whether or not it's permissible under God's law. You are asking this question because your hearts are hardened against me and you are attempting to lay a trap for me."

If you have paid close attention, I don't think that Jesus ever actually gave us a clear answer to the question... Is divorce OK or not.... He simply exposes the root of the problem. Exposes their real agenda...

--All problems in human relationships have their origins in alienation.

--All solutions to these problems have their origins in acceptance or in reconciliation.

If we read but a little bit farther in the gospel of Mark, we hear Jesus tell us about that solution...

“Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

They confront the fact, “How impossible it is... Because then no one can be saved, because no one is righteous.... Not even ONE... We are all sinners. And, as such, we are all lost.

Divorce is a sin? But then, how many sins are there? In what ways have you sinned? How is your heart hardened? In what way have you excluded and alienated? Or having been excluded and alienated, then moved on in revenge or retaliation? Hardening your own hearts in response?

Is divorce permitted? I suppose it has to be.

In the same way that God’s judgement results in sending people to hell. What C.S. Lewis calls, “The Great Divorce” and why not? Jesus refers to his relationship with the church in the same terms as a marriage between Bride and Groom.

Jesus calls himself the Bridegroom,

“And Jesus said to them, “The attendants of the bridegroom do not fast, so-long as the bridegroom is with them, do they? So while they have the bridegroom with them, neither do my disciples fast. But the day will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.”

It’s God’s desire that we should all enter into His kingdom, but it is a sad reality that not everyone will enter into His glory. That some ... and perhaps even most... will not enter into the kingdom but enter into his divine judgement.

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son....

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

I hesitate to call that GOOD. Because it does not seem good to me judgement should fall upon some but not others. And yet I know that it is GOOD, even if it grieves the Lord that some should be so hardened against His love, that they will not love and trust the person and work of His son. Not even for their own salvation.

Therefore I hesitate also to say much about divorce other than that it is permitted because of the hardness of hearts. Some will further limit the permission to cases of infidelity or abuse, but in the end the cause is the alienation of affection. One partner abandons the other or perhaps they abandon each other, but either way it results in something like a little hell on earth as the fall out often involves others in the family.

I can't call it good. But I can say that sometimes, it is the best worst solution. And I can also say that there is forgiveness of all sins, even this one. There is forgiveness for every sin with the exception of unbelief. That is the power of the cross.

That doesn't give us license to sin, by the way... the generous availability of free grace... We mustn't take that as permission... (Sin NOW, repent later).

We do that all the time, but the danger is that attitude can lead us into cheap grace... and we end up treating our Lord with contempt and so we might well become unbelievers. (See the caution in our second reading, [Hebrews 2:1-13 \(14-18\)](#))

If we are humble before God and take seriously the weight of our sins, which we cast on HIM, by the way, so small wonder if we feel guiltless... But if we consider them as generously paid for when we are penniless... then the words of Jesus become real gospel for us...

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." AMEN