

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: The Sticky Issue of Divorce, Mark 10:1-12

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INTRODUCTION: I understand the cross as being redemptive in all ways. The cross is not punitive. The cross is punitive for those who don't believe. But, the cross—the redemptive work of Christ—is meant for all people of all times. So, today as I speak about this sticky subject of divorce, I want you to join me in seeing the redemptive work of Christ.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 10:1-12 ¹*Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.*

²*Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”*

³*“What did Moses command you?” he replied.*

⁴*They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.*

⁵*“It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied. ⁶“But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’*

⁷*‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh.*

⁹*Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”*

¹⁰*When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. ¹¹He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. ¹²And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”*

EXPLANATION: In our passage today, the Pharisees are again attempting to stump Jesus as he is teaching. What better way to try to stump Jesus than to bring up the sticky issue of divorce? It is indeed a sticky issue. It was a sticky issue then, and it is a sticky issue now. When it is addressed from the pulpit, people immediately wonder how the pastor is going to approach the subject. Just the mention of the word “divorce” immediately creates tension among those in a congregation.

Many of you have experienced the devastating pain of divorce, either in your own marriage or in your family. It calls forth within all of us so many emotions ... anger, guilt, regret, sorrow, loss, tragedy, disappointment, betrayal, pain...

Few things are more painful than divorce. It cuts to the depth of personhood like no other relational slash. It is more heart wrenching than the death of a spouse. Death is a clean break. Divorce is a dirty break. The upheaval of life in a divorce is immeasurable. The far-reaching consequences are incalculable. Friends begin to fall away. The rejection leaves victims of divorce isolated and lonely.

Then, there is the agonizing over the children. What consequences will they bear? Are they going to grow up with permanent scars? Custody battles complicate the scenario. Visitation rights dividing time between spouses and spouses’ families have to be decided upon. The children become pawns, caught in the battle of the parents.

We can’t count on the court system to always do right by the children.

I think we all have painful stories here. How about the judge who separated nursing twins, giving one to each parent?

ILLUSTRATION: I was a witness in a divorce court case one time. A woman brought me in as a character witness because her husband was fighting for custody of their son. The lawyer of her soon to be ex-husband asked me to verify whether the woman had served on various committees in the church. He asked me to describe these responsibilities. I felt like I was building a strong case for the woman, and then the lawyer turned to the judge and said, “Your Honor, this woman is so wrapped up in her church that she has no time for her son.”

The complications of divorce go on and on.

Then there are the situations where for a wife/mother to remain under the cruel domination of an abusive husband is not simply difficult, but dangerous. Abuse is against the nature of God.

OVERVIEW: Divorce is a large subject, but today we will look at three points:

1. Two ways for the Church to approach divorce
2. God's original intention
3. The Covenant

First, TWO WAYS FOR THE CHURCH TO APPROACH DIVORCE

There are two ways for the Church to respond with love and compassion to the sticky issue of divorce. And, I pray our fellowship here at Tusculum Hills will rise to the occasion to help in both the short term and long term.

1. The first way we as a Church can respond is short term. We can come alongside divorced persons and stand by them as they grieve and try to regain their emotional equilibrium after the devastating loss of divorce. There are so many things a loving fellowship can do to walk alongside those who find themselves in this situation.
 - a. We need to provide a place for them at church. Surely we can come alongside people and encourage them through this difficult time.
 - b. Also, we need to help them move through the steps of forgiveness of both their spouse and themselves. This issue of forgiveness, especially in divorce, is huge. Walking with someone through forgiveness is not easy.

ILLUSTRATION: A woman talking about forgiving her abusive husband shook her head, "I don't know if I can do that." When she understood forgiveness simply means letting it go, releasing it, she got free from it. Forgiveness isn't condoning other's behavior, but it is a letting go in such a way a person's life moves on

without being consumed with what another person did to you. We need to help those divorced get free from the bitterness of un-forgiveness.

c. Next, we need to reach out to them on a personal and social level. Include them in dinners and family gatherings. Just because they are no longer a couple, doesn't mean they don't want the fellowship of families.

d. Another thing the Church can do is make sure their needs are being met. I'm afraid we drop the ball here because as onlookers, we get so caught up in the blame game.

One of the biggest issues among single moms is car repair. Is that something we can help out with?

If the fellowship of believers is to be a family, why do those divorced sometimes feel they cannot call on members of the family when their car won't start, or they have a flat tire, or they run out of gas? Are we being a loving family to those who have had to endure the scathing complications of divorce?

e. We need to provide adequate counseling and support groups for them. I'm embarrassed to admit sometimes pastors have given the worst advice as far as divorce is concerned. Our training for counseling is perhaps not quite adequate to counsel those in complicated situations—well intentioned but inadequate.

We need to have a good referral system of godly, wise, well-trained counselors to whom we can send those going through a divorce. And, if we need to help financially, we should be prepared to do that. Radical? Maybe, but needed. A newly divorced single mother hardly ever has enough financial means for counseling. She's struggling to pay the rent and buy groceries, and many times, the husband is not paying the court-ordered child support. They need help.

We need to have divorce recovery groups to walk hurting individuals through the process of getting back on their feet. Maybe we could provide helpful and inspirational books, single mom groups, etc.

2. The second way a church can respond lovingly and with compassion to divorce is long term, and I fear today's Church has failed miserably in this aspect. We have failed to articulate the sacredness of marriage, to foster a hatred for divorce, to see why God's ideal will is against it, and to do all we can to keep it from happening.

Second, GOD'S ORIGINAL INTENTION

What I am about to say may sound harsh and difficult at first, but I hope you will hear the love and compassion in what I am about to say.

Compromises to the sacredness and life-long commitments in marriage may feel loving in the short run, but they create havoc and chaos as the years go by. Preserving the solid framework of the marriage covenant with high standards may feel tough and abrasive in the short term, but it produces ten thousand blessings for future generations.

APPLICATION: Do any of us disagree that our culture is in disarray? Would any of us disagree that disarray is due in large part to the disintegration of the family? Jesus took those listening to his teaching back to Genesis to ground them in God's original intention.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 10:6-9 ⁶ *“But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ ⁷ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”*

EXPLANATION: God's original intention was for a man and his wife to remain together until God separates them, and the only separation is in death. Because man's heart had grown cold in this world broken by sin, God told Moses he would permit it. But, it's never been God's desire for man and woman.

Third, THE COVENANT

Marriage is not purely a human transaction. The ultimate meaning of marriage is the representation of the covenant-keeping love between Christ and his Church.

Marriage is not a vow (although we take marriage vows). It is not a contract that can be broken. It is a covenant—which is not to be broken. To walk out this truth in our daily lives is what it means—on the deepest level—to be married.

This is what the Church has failed to teach, emulate, and model for the people of God—that marriage is covenant. We need to get serious about the sacredness of marriage.

Against the backdrop of diminishing attitudes about marriage in the world, Jesus' words about marriage are breathtaking. Marriage is the work of God, not man, and it is not man's prerogative to end it. *What God has joined together, let not man separate* (Mark 10:9).

In several previous sermons, I told you the meaning of covenants in the Bible. The marriage covenant is made not to be broken.

ILLUSTRATION: I know a couple who've been married over 50 years, but many years ago, there were problems in the marriage. The wife of the couple had strong emotions for another man and wanted to divorce her husband. But, she just couldn't because she knew it was wrong. She and her husband went to counseling, and in time, God restored her emotions and the marriage. They are glad they believed God rather than taking the advice of friends or following the culture of the day.

You know, there are divorced people who actually have a good second marriage, and they regret not believing God to restore their first marriage.

CONCLUSION: The Church is comprised of broken people. We are all broken by sin, and we all need forgiveness. The mandate of the Church is to preach the gospel and equip the saints for the work of the ministry. If we only preach the gospel and don't bind up the brokenhearted, we have fallen short. If we only bind up the brokenhearted and don't preach the gospel, we have fallen short.

Jesus gave us a tremendous life lesson in the manner in which he dealt with the adulterous woman and the woman at the well. He spoke unadulterated truth to them, but he offered compassion and forgiveness as well. We must do the same. Speak the truth of the sacredness of marriage and the truth—God does not desire divorce for

his people. Offer compassion and forgiveness to those who have been caught in the trap of divorce.

This altar is open today if you need to come to Jesus for salvation or if you need prayer. Or, perhaps you would like to join our fellowship. Or, perhaps you have a lingering heartache or un-forgiveness caused by the ravages of divorce. We are here to pray with you. The altar is open.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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