

Marriage and Divorce

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 March 2026

Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] The Old Testament reading comes from Genesis chapter 1 verses 27 and 28 and Genesis chapter 2 verses 18 through to 25. Please join me as we read Genesis chapter 1 verses 27 and 28.

Genesis chapter 2 beginning at verse 18.

The Lord God said, So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep.

And while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh.

Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man and he brought her to the man.

The man said, That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife and they become one flesh.

[2 : 24] Adam and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame. This is the word of the Lord.

This Bible reading is from Mark chapter 10 verses 1 to 12.

Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judah and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him and as was his custom, he taught them. Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

What did Moses command you? he replied. They said, It was because your hearts were hard that Moses were due to the Lord, Jesus replied.

But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man would leave his father and mother and be united to his wife. And the two would become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh.

Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her.

[3 : 33] And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery. This is the word of the Lord. Alright, we're going to continue in Mark chapter 10 today.

But before we get there, I need to correct an error that I made last week. Lest I cause anyone to stumble. And it's specifically related to that verse.

Chapter 9 verse 42. On stumbling others. And what I had said, if you were here and you actually remember, was that it would be better for the little ones to be thrown into the sea rather than to be stumbled and find themselves in hell.

Now, actually the them in that verse is singular in Greek. And so actually it's not a reference to the little ones. It's a reference to the one who is doing the stumbling. So it does not diminish my point that it's the seriousness of sin and stumbling others so that they come under God's judgment.

But really the image that you should have in your head is not the little ones being thrown into the sea, but the one who stumbles being thrown into the sea. So I hope that makes sense. And yeah, just to correct that.

[4 : 46] Now, today is yet another challenging passage for different reasons. So don't be surprised if next week I might have another addendum to add before I start. But the topic of divorce is sadly one that is, I think, impacts all of us, doesn't it?

Some of us are personally impacted by it. Others, we may have our parents who are caught up in that, or we have friends or other family members. And in all of these cases, it's always a difficult situation and it causes a lot of trauma, a lot of hurt, a lot of heartache.

And so as we tackle this passage today, I want to encourage us actually not to go immediately to those situations that we've been part of as our first response to Jesus' words.

Rather, I would like us to just hear Jesus on His terms first because we need to hear the bigger message of God's creation plan that He has for us, the plan for humanity before we get down to the

specifics of the individual relationships or the individual situations which we are caught up in. And of course, these relationships are quite complex. And so even though I'm going to deal with some of that at the end, we can only deal with it in general terms because every marriage has its own unique factors and circumstances to consider.

[6 : 21] Alright, so those are my opening words, but let's get into the passage now with the scene as it is set up in chapter 10 verse 1. Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and crossed the Jordan.

Again, crowds of people came to Him and as was His custom, He taught them. Some Pharisees came and tested Him by asking, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

Now we see then that this dialogue on marriage was not initiated by Jesus, but actually the Pharisees. And they were doing it not because they wanted genuine answers, but to test and to trap Jesus.

Now many of you will know that the Pharisees are meant to be the learned ones, right? The righteous ones, those who strictly kept the law. But Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and so they were threatened by Jesus.

They knew it. And so Jesus here now knows that they're actually here to trick Him. And He doesn't answer them directly, but actually counters with His own question. And so He says in the next verse, What did Moses command you? He replied.

[7 : 29] And they said, Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away. And so it seems actually that they already know the answer, or so they think.

But if we look closely at where they're quoting from, they've quoted from Deuteronomy 24, verse 1-4, we see that actually their answer is not strictly what Moses said in Deuteronomy.

It is their interpretation of that passage. So let's go to Deuteronomy 24, where this is what Moses said precisely. If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her, and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her, and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her, and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband who divorced her is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled.

That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance. And so you see that this writing of a certificate is not really a command, is it?

Rather, the command is for him not to remarry his first wife when he's divorced her, and when she's remarried.

[8 : 59] And, you know, the Pharisees, I think, even acknowledge this, because what they say is that Moses permitted this rather than Moses commanded this. But what they omit, of course, is the prohibition on remarriage, which is really the command in this passage.

The reason now for the certificate is really to protect the woman, because during those times, the wealth and the rights in the marriage resided with the husband, and he in turn was meant to provide for and protect the wife.

And so if she's sent away, the certificate showed that the husband has relinquished his marital rights, so that if she then seeks to remarry, which she will have to do, because otherwise, if her original family doesn't take her back, she will be destitute, no one to look after her.

But if she seeks to remarry, the potential husband is then assured that this first husband is not going to come after her and him in order to get her back.

Moses' command, then, is really a protection for this woman. Given the divorce, whether it's rightly or wrongly, has already occurred.

[10 : 14] What Moses is trying to do is not have the first husband change his mind and remarry her if the second marriage fell through as well. Otherwise, he sins even though she was originally his wife.

What the Pharisees have done is to have taken this, which is a specific scenario or case study, and turned it into a rule that permitted divorce.

You know, yeah, get divorced, but make sure the paperwork is done properly. Right? Later on, different schools of thought emerged as to, if you remember what Moses said at the start, that there was indecency of the wife, they began to consider what would constitute being indecent by the wife.

So one view that was very lax, permitted divorce for a reason as trivial, and this is found in the writings of a rabbi, for a reason as trivial as a spoiled meal.

That was a ground for divorce. All right? Thankfully, no one does that nowadays. But other Pharisees, they adopted a stricter view. And it said that divorce was only allowed for serious things like sexual immorality.

[11 : 32] But I think in both cases, the main point has somewhat been lost, hasn't it? Because they focus on the divorce rather than God's intended design for marriage in the first place.

You know, it's a bit like the rules of a family. I know some of you don't like those, but let's say there's a rule in the house that says, the kids need to wash the dishes after dinner.

Right? Immediately. And certainly prior to going to bed for the night. But you know, one time, these kids, they're exhausted from school, and they have a meltdown, let's say.

And out of kindness, parents say, Okay, kids, do it first thing next morning. After you're rested. But soon, what was originally a concession becomes the norm.

You know, we're all pretty smart as kids as well. We, you know, start to complain that we're always tired after school, whether we are or not. And so we only want to do it in the morning.

[12 : 36] And then guess what? Before you know it, the kids wake up late for school as well. And so the dishes don't get done. The goalposts have shifted, haven't they?

And that's why Jesus returns to the original goalposts in Genesis, not Deuteronomy, with his answer in verse 5. And so he begins by saying, It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law.

Deuteronomy 24 is meant to be a concession, a retrieval of a breakdown in God's original design to limit further damage or further sin.

What they've done in Jesus' day and before is to normalize it. What Moses had intended to be a protection for the vulnerable, in this case the woman, and then to stop the man from sinning further, they've made the norm now.

When really, marriage should have been honored in the first place. And so really, the Pharisees should have answered by going back to Genesis chapter 1 and 2, which is where Jesus directs them in verse 6.

[13 : 45] This is not meant to be new to them, it's a reminder, but he says, But at the beginning of creation, the point being, this is God's design for creation, God made them male and female.

This is for all humanity, not just for the Jewish people. And why did God make them male and female? Well, so that as two distinct sexes, humanity would fulfill God's creation mandate.

Because what follows straight after verse 27, which is what Jesus quotes, is this verse here in verse 28, where the command is to be fruitful and increase in number, to fill the earth and subdue it.

Filling the earth is best done in the stability of a family, which is provided for with a strong and permanent marriage between a man and a woman.

And so, Jesus follows immediately with Genesis chapter 2, by then saying, describing marriage in verse 7, For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

[14 : 54] So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate. So, this really should be the primary text that informs God's view on divorce.

Marriage is designed to be a permanent union, a joining of two by God, to become one flesh, which no one should separate. And that last sentence there, no one should separate, is actually not there in Genesis, but it flows naturally, a natural conclusion from what it means to be one flesh.

The one flesh nature of marriage gives us directly how we ought to think about divorce. In marriage, God brings together two people to become one flesh.

They don't cease to be two people. They don't lose their original personalities, but they're now united in destiny. For better, for worse.

For richer, for poorer, as the vows go. And so God blesses them as one flesh. He matures them and develops them as one flesh. He sees them as one, and from which that union comes a family to children or whether there are no children.

[16 : 12] Now, as an aside, while we're on these verses, they also show what Jesus' view on same-sex marriage is. Now, some people have argued that Jesus has never said anything explicitly to prohibit same-sex marriage, but if you look at what Jesus has done here, Jesus interprets Genesis 1 and 2 together.

Genesis 1, verse 27, and Genesis 2, verse 24, which is what he quotes, are actually not contiguous verses. Right? It's separated by a lot of other verses and narrative.

And so Jesus could have easily omitted Genesis 1, verse 27. Think about it. If that verse was not there, the argument would still hold, but Jesus joins them together one after another and with the words for this reason.

He's showing that God's purpose for creating humanity, male and female, is to support the institution of marriage so that through it the creation mandate can be fulfilled.

Because modern technology notwithstanding, it's only the male sperm and a female egg that can produce human life. That's God's design in nature.

[17 : 30] And so, in a marriage, a new family is created, hence the leaving of mother and father, which enables human flourishing. And divorce is a clear violation of God's creation purpose.

Now, of course, the disciples here needed a bit more clarification as they often do. And so, in verse 10, when they were in the house again, they followed up with Jesus, they asked Jesus about this. And so, if verses 5 to 9 dealt with the teaching on marriage, which we just looked at, and its implications for divorce, verses 11 and 12 now deal with the teaching on divorce and its implications for remarriage.

Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery. And so, if divorce in the first place is a violation of God's creation mandate for marriage, the act of remarriage adds to that violation by causing the sexual union in the second marriage, and there's a union, there's a one-flesh thing happening there, to be an act of adultery as well.

This occurs because the original marriage is still seen in God's eyes as the one-flesh union that still exists, notwithstanding that humanly a divorce has occurred and been permitted to occur, and a valid marriage has then occurred after that with the remarriage.

[19 : 06] And so, the act of adultery then is not just an act of unfaithfulness to a spouse, that is true, but against God in that it violates His creation mandate in marriage.

And I want to say that such a violation is actually not limited to this instance of divorce. It applies to all other forms of sexual immorality, right?

Sex before marriage, having an affair, even lusting in your heart after a person who is not your spouse, as Jesus says. Those are all violations that goes against God's purpose to one degree or another for marriage, and therefore is sin.

And so, in that sense, the failure to uphold the sanctity of marriage is not just limited to those who are divorced. If we check our own lives and our own hearts, I think none of us will be able to stand before God with any sense of self-righteousness.

Alright? So I think we've all failed to one degree or another. But what we now need to hear then is that God is gracious. God is gracious.

[20 : 24] Which is why even in the Old Testament, concessions like Deuteronomy 24 was provided. Not to normalize divorce, but to prevent further sinning.

And in particular, to protect the so-called innocent party in a marital breakdown. Thus, in these verses here, Jesus also says it's the one who initiates the divorce that commits the adultery, whether it's the man or the woman.

And if we go to the passages in Matthew, the equivalent ones that are exactly mirroring these ones, so there's chapter 5, verse 32, and Matthew chapter 19, verse 9, the same instruction is actually caveated as follows, and I'll just read the one from Matthew chapter 5.

It says, anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery. I think I might have the verse as well on the slide.

So the caveat there is, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery. So the one who is being divorced, if she's not guilty of sexual immorality, is the victim.

[21 : 40] Can you see? Not the guilty party. And sexual immorality is given here as an exception because if the divorce follows an act of sexual immorality, the act of adultery has already occurred.

It occurred with the sexual immorality, not with the remarriage after. And so if she's the one then that's guilty of adultery and the wife then divorces her for her sin, he's not guilty of the adultery she will commit if she remarries.

All right, let me try and summarize this because whilst I'll deal with some of the specifics in a while, I think the principles that we need to get, the big picture principles that we need to take from Jesus is

that the sanctity of marriage needs to be upheld by all.

Even though we may not be perfect, marriage needs to be honored by all, whether we're single or married. If we're single, then we need to honor the marriages that we're in community with.

And in all cases, we have to say that where a divorce occurs, this has come about only because there has been hardness of heart and sin.

[23 : 01] Sometimes, it's just one party, not both. But other times, two people involved. It may be even people outside the marriage. Now, it doesn't mean that if there is the presence of marital sin, that this always needs to result in divorce.

Because, as we will see later, with God, there is always room for repentance and forgiveness. But where divorce does occur, it's only because there was some sin in the first place.

But, as far as it is up to us, if we kind of find ourselves in this situation, even though we cannot control the actions of everyone else involved in this, we can always do our part to limit our sinful involvement in it.

So, if we have sinned, we can repent. And if we have not, then we can still do our best to ensure marriage is honoured so that sin is limited.

Now, God, in His kindness as well, that's a third point, also provides for and protects the victim. And it's not just in the Old Testament like Deuterion 24, we have another example even in the New Testament because Paul does say, for example, in 1 Corinthians that if a wife, a believing wife, would just become a Christian, that the unbelieving husband wants to divorce her, then she's actually released from her marital vows.

[24 : 37] She's not responsible. She should try not to be, but if the husband wants to still divorce her, that's fine. She's allowed to. And so, what I want to say then is that all of us need to be slow to conclude, we shouldn't be too quick to conclude that every person who is divorced and then remarried has committed adultery.

There can be innocent victims as well. And sometimes, the victims are not just in relation to sexual immorality because there are other sins at play too.

like abandonment and abuse. In fact, this morning, one man came up to me afterwards and said his father was abandoned by his wife.

And had he not remarried, he would not be alive. So, his father was totally innocent. He was abandoned by his wife.

And also, while it's common in Jesus' day for women to be victims, victims, it can apply to men as well. And today, with equal rights, it can be either the man or the woman that is the victim.

[25 : 54] Now, of course, when we then begin to apply all this specifically, the other thing that we need to remember, in one sense even more important, is that even though God's plan for creation and hence the sanctity of marriage is important, just as important, is God's plan of redemption for creation.

Because none of us, even those of us who are happily married, are sinless. And so, above all else, we need to overlay everything that I've just said with the wonderful gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Right? It is God's grace to us that we need to hear, even as we try and deal with some of these very complicated issues with divorce and remarriage.

Now, I've prepared this sermon more for the morning people, so I don't think there are too many of you here, but for any of us here that are divorced or remarried, then the first thing we need to hear, the first question I want to put to you is, do you love Jesus?

And do you believe and trust in Him? Because if you do, then what you need to hear first and foremost is that the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ abounds to you.

[27 : 12] That is the big thing you need to hear. As the song lyrics go, our sins they are many, His mercy is more. And we need to hear that.

Just as with anything we've fallen short of, God is able to forgive all of us because of His Son Jesus who died for us on the cross. I don't know whether you've ever taken out health or car insurance, maybe your parents have, but sometimes with car insurance they call it comprehensive insurance, right?

But we know it's never comprehensive, is it? Because if you read the fine print, there's always some exclusion or another, right? Let me say that this is not the case with Jesus' death.

His sacrifice for us is truly comprehensive. No exclusions, no carve-outs, it covers everything, even divorce and adultery.

And so knowing this, our first response and our ongoing response really is to be humble before God so that we might be forgiven, to repent and have His blood, the blood of Jesus, wash us as white as snow and then know for sure that we are forgiven.

[28 : 30] Whether it's the marital breakdown in the first place or subsequent actions, God is able to forgive us, all of us, in Christ Jesus. And many things that has occurred in our lives, none of that can be reversed, can it?

And yet God forgives them all. The point then is being forgiven how we proceed from here. That should be the focus of our attention.

And here is where things does get complicated, right? and the right thing to do will be specific to every situation. Because if you think about it, some marriages or remarriages,!

They are decades old, right? And new families might even have been formed from it with children involved. In other cases, there's domestic violence or children that are vulnerable.

And, you know, even when there is repentance of the guilty party, sometimes we do need to sadly form a judgment as to whether that repentance is genuine. And so, while I've hopefully laid out some principles earlier, we actually need wisdom in specific circumstances and to think through each of this carefully, prayerfully, and seek godly counsel.

[29 : 50] And so, if you know someone or you need to speak, then please do. Speak to one of the pastors others or myself. But when you love Jesus, the good news is that you can come to this issue without shame or judgment.

The aim is still to live from here on in, in a manner that honors God and upholds His solemn purpose for marriage, but we don't need to bear the guilt of things that I've done in the past. But the last thing I want to say is that as Christians, this institution of marriage is worth protecting on earth, all of us, whether we're married or not, because imperfect though human marriages are, it bears witness to the greatest marriage of all, that between Jesus and His church, His bride. And let me say that with that marriage, Christ is the perfect husband, which means there is no possibility of marital breakdown with Jesus.

And such is His amazing love that it even compensates for all the imperfections of His bride, the church, which means that His perfect life and sacrificial death will ensure that we too one day will be presented faultless as His bride before the throne of God.

[31 : 18] And so all of us who believe in Jesus, whether we're married or single or divorced or remarried, we are part of this perfect marriage. And one day, that will be consummated in the new creation.

Any human marriages now, even if you love your husband or your wife, that will not exist come the new creation. marriage, the only marriage that will exist is that between Jesus and the church. And so I think that should motivate all of us, isn't it? Whether we're married or not, to respect God's institution of marriage on earth, because when we do then in a small way, what we're doing is testifying and encouraging others to join in this eternal marriage that will one day be all of us to enjoy with Jesus as us as the church and Jesus as the husband.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word, which is unchanging and eternal. And by it, you have established marriage as the lifelong union between a man and a woman.

Thank you that also by it, you have pointed towards the greater marriage of Christ and his church. Please, forgive us when we fail in our lives to honour what you have established.

[32 : 44] Help us to do what is right in your eyes from here on in. And we thank you for Jesus. And we thank you that because of him, we have the great hope of being in this heavenly marriage between him and his church.

Inspire us and give us the strength to live for him until the day he returns. In his name we pray. Amen.