

Mark 10:1-16 ~ Scripture Verses

Divorce

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.’ [a] ⁷ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, [b] ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.’ [c] So they are no longer two, but one. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

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

The Little Children and Jesus

¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Footnotes:

a. Mark 10:6 – Genesis 1:27

b. Mark 10:7 – Some early manuscripts do not have *and be united to his wife*.

c. Mark 10:8 – Genesis 2:22-24

Mark 10:1-16 ~ Discussion Questions

1. Moses allowed a husband to divorce his wife for what reason(s)? (Deut 24:1)
2. Many states today allow “no fault” divorce on mutual consent of husband and wife. What “fault” grounds are specified for one party to divorce the other?
3. What is the rate of divorce in the U.S. today? Where is it highest?
4. “The family that prays together, stays together.” Are Christians less likely to divorce than atheists or members of other religions?
5. What did Jesus say about the ground on which Moses allowed divorce? What would he say about our grounds today?
6. What did God say about divorce? (Malachi 2:13-16)
7. How did Jesus explain the relationship between Moses’ law and the will of God? (Mark 10:5-9, Genesis 2:22-24, 1 Corinthians 6:16-20)
8. Why do you think the disciples asked Jesus again about this question privately? (10:10) What specific instructions did he give in his answer? (10:11-12)
9. How should we view people with struggling or failed marriages? What can we do to help?
10. What should a person who is divorced or divorced and remarried do?
11. How was Jesus’ attitude toward the little children different from the disciples? (Mark 10:13-16) How could the disciples still not understand what’s going on?
12. Why did Jesus want the children to come to him? (10:14)
13. Jesus said, “... the kingdom of God belongs to such as these [children].” Do you think that all children will enter the kingdom of God (heaven)?
14. What does it mean to “receive the kingdom of God like a little child?” (10:15) How can we have the attitude of a little child?
15. What is the practical message from this short story with respect to our churches and Christian gatherings today? How can we apply it?

Mark 10:1-16 ~ Leader's Guide

1. Moses allowed a husband to divorce his wife for what reason(s)?

Deut 24:1 – 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, ...

2. Many states today allow “no fault” divorce on mutual consent of husband and wife. What “fault” grounds are specified for one party to divorce the other?

Massachusetts has seven “fault” grounds for divorce:

- A) Cruel and abusive treatment
- B) Utter desertion continued for one year
- C) Sentence of confinement in a penal institution for 5 years or more
- D) Gross and confirmed habits of intoxication caused by voluntary and excessive use of intoxicating liquor, opium or other drugs
- E) Gross or wanton and cruel refusal or neglect to provide suitable support and maintenance for the other spouse
- F) Adultery
- G) Impotency

New Jersey has similar grounds but only requires 18 months imprisonment (C) and requires that an addiction be for 12 months or more (D), does not include non-support (E), but adds two additional grounds:

- H) Deviant sexual conduct
- I) Institutionalized for mental illness for 12 or more consecutive months

Some states have fewer grounds (Texas has only 5) and some have more (Alabama has 12)

3. What is the percent rate of divorce in the U.S. today? Where is it highest?

The divorce rate is high, but probably lower than you think. A common myth is that half of all marriages in the United States end in divorce. In reality this is impossible to measure accurately and this myth is based on an misinterpretation of data stating that, in any given year, the number of marriages is about twice the number of divorces. But those divorces are not necessarily of marriages made in the same year, but could have occurred at any time, rendering this statistic irrelevant to marital outcome.

More reliable statistics are available that measure the percentage of marriages that end in divorce within 10 years. One data set based on age of the bride indicates that the rate is 48% for people under 18, 40% for ages 18–19, 29% for 20-24, and 24% for 25 and older. The best figures for lifetime divorce rates are from a Barna study (see #4 below); they are higher than the figures above, of

course, but certainly not anything like 50%.

The highest rate of divorce is in Nevada (again, misleading, because many people go there just to get a divorce). In actuality, the highest rate is in Arkansas by far, and the lowest rates are in Georgia (one of the highest “churched” states) and Massachusetts (#47 in church attendance). Go figure.

The data shows that the highest divorce rates are found in the Bible Belt. The divorce rates in these conservative states are roughly 50 percent above the national average. (See next question)

4. “The family that prays together, stays together.” Are Christians less likely to divorce than atheists or members of other religions?

There has been much anecdotal evidence that has led to unsubstantiated claims that the divorce rate for Christians who attended church regularly, pray together or who meet other conditions is only 1 or 2 percent. This is highly suspect. In fact, the Barna Research Group found that divorce rates among conservative Christians were significantly *higher* than for other religious groups, and much higher than atheists and agnostics

George Barna commented: “While it may be alarming to discover that born again Christians are more likely than others to experience a divorce, that pattern has been in place for quite some time. Even more disturbing, perhaps, is that when those individuals experience a divorce, many of them feel their community of faith provides rejection rather than support and healing.”

Some selected results from the Barna study:

<i>Religion</i>	<i>% have been divorced</i>
Jews	30%
Born-again Christians	27%
Non-denominational	34%
Other Christians	24%
Baptists	29%
Mainline Protestants	25%
Mormons	24%
Roman Catholics	21%
Lutherans	21%
Atheists, Agnostics	21%

5. What did Jesus say about the grounds on which Moses allowed divorce? What would he say about our grounds today?

Jesus said Moses allowed the Jews to divorce because “your hearts are hard,” in other words divorce was an accommodation to human weakness and was used to bring order in a society that had disregarded God’s will, but it was not the standard that God had originally intended. The purpose of Deut 24:1-4 was not to

make divorce acceptable, but to reduce the hardship of its consequences.

God's law of creation (Genesis 2:22-24) is higher than the law of Moses and is the one that Jesus said ought to be obeyed.

Genesis 2:22-24 – ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. ²³ The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”

²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

6. What did God say about divorce? (Malachi 2:13-16)

Malachi 2:13-16 – ¹³ And this second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. ¹⁴ But you say, “Why does he not?” Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. ¹⁵ Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. ¹⁶ “For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.” [ESV]

For 2:16, the NIV simply says, “I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel...

7. How did Jesus explain the relationship between Moses' law and the will of God? (Mark 10:5-9, Genesis 2:22-24, 1 Corinthians 6:16-20)

The divine intention for husband and wife was monogamy. Together they were to form as inseparable a union as that between parent and child. As parents and their children are of the same “flesh and blood,” so husband and wife should be bound together as “one flesh” as long as they live—of which sexual union is an expression.

Paul explained this further in 1 Corinthians 6:16 – ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

8. Why do you think the disciples asked Jesus again about this question privately? (10:10) What specific instructions did he give in his answer? (10:11-12)

Why did they ask again? Perhaps because Jesus took a very hard line and completely threw away the idea from Moses and Jewish law that under certain circumstances divorce was allowed. The disciples wanted clarification. And Jesus gave it to them.

We should note two things in Jesus' answer. First, it is an unequivocal, perfectly clear statement. Could Jesus have stated his point any more clearly?

Second, this conclusion is perfectly consistent with the teaching that precedes it. God intends marriage to last a lifetime. God joins man and wife together. Man has no business breaking that relationship. This is what we would expect, given what he has said about marriage: If you desire to become like Christ, if you claim that you are being transformed into Christlikeness, then you will not divorce your spouse under any circumstances. (Oh, my!)

9. How should we view people with struggling or failed marriages? What can we do to help?

A very tough question. If we read the scripture, it seem that our answer should be a simple one: "Don't do it. Stay together. Work out your differences." Even if we admit that it is never as simple as that, that is still what the scriptures say.

But what if it has gone past the point of no return: either the couple is actually divorced or they are so far along, there is no turning back. What then? Anyone going through a divorce needs a friend, hopefully more than one. Here are some practical ways to be such a friend.

1. Do NOT promise anything that you will not fully keep to its fullest extent. Even with the greatest intentions, if you do not keep your promises, you will do greater damage and the effects may last for years.

2. Be a good listener. Don't have all the answers, but rather, always be praying and seeking the Lord's heart on how to pull them through.

3. Help with the children: encouraging them, sitting them and walking them through the pain of their hearts.

4. Financially: He/she will need ongoing money; otherwise she may end up out on the streets. Rally others in the church and friends to help. It must be ongoing (perhaps for years) because he/she and his/her kids are alive every day. On the other hand, you can't and shouldn't be a financial enabler; yes the situation is tough but the reality of getting a job and cutting expenses must be faced.

5. Help with working through the alimony and child support process. Help make up a reasonable budget and figure how to live within it. Both spouses have to live; the "injured" one can't expect to other one to pay for everything.

6. Find a good mediator (rather than a lawyer) if at all possible who will be efficient and fair. Then help pay for the process.

7. Emotional support: They will need to call any hour of the day or night—and you can expect it at the most inconvenient hours. You will be their bright light in their dark hour. And remember #1, do not offer anything if you will not do it.

8. Help him/her to not feel any less of a Christian because of the divorce. God will still love the divorced person and the person can still love God and be a respected Christian.

10. What should a person who is divorced or divorced and remarried do?

Coty Pinckney, pastor of the Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA says if you are divorced already, you should pray for reconciliation, and a renewal of the marriage. Even if you can't imagine ever getting back together with your former husband or wife, pray that you might fully forgive him or her. Get rid of all bitterness and anger. If you did not fight the divorce, or if you promoted it, repent and seek forgiveness. Find your satisfaction in God alone, and make Him the desire of your heart.

Are you divorced and remarried? Then there now is no opportunity for reconciliation. But you can still repent, and seek forgiveness. You can also glorify God in your present marriage. You sinned; but God can use even our sins for his glory and our good. Do repent, but don't dwell on, "Oh, what might have been." You sinned; seek forgiveness; and then glorify God fully in your life from now on. Remember the popular saying from the 60's, "Today is the first day in the rest of your life."

11. How was Jesus' attitude toward the little children different from the disciples? (Mark 10:13-16) How could the disciples still not understand what's going on?

The situation is as if disciples are saying, "Don't you know who this is? Don't you know how important his time is? He doesn't have time for little children! Children can't help fulfill the mission. Children can't bring about the kingdom of God. They have no political clout, no useful contacts."

But Jesus sees this completely differently. Jesus is indignant! He is ticked off! He is angry. This is the only time in scripture that Jesus is said to be indignant. He is indignant because this is wrong! The disciples are once again demonstrating that they don't get it! Once again we see that they misunderstand the Kingdom of God, they misunderstand Jesus' work.

The disciples misunderstand Jesus' mission and the kingdom of God the same way we often do. Thinking back to the previous verses, we try to determine under what circumstances divorce is permitted by God. What is it about, "let not man separate" that we don't understand?

12. Why did Jesus want the children to come to him? (10:14)

Interestingly, most study Bibles and commentators seem to imply that the children were coming to Jesus. No they weren't, nor was Jesus calling them to him. Their parents were bringing them, just as parents today bring their little kids to see Santa Claus. The parents wanted Jesus to touch their children to bless them. They are seeking a visible means of conveying God's blessing on their lives.

Jesus was happy to have them come, to lay his hands on them, and even to hug them and he told his disciples not to hinder them.

13. Jesus said, "... the kingdom of God belongs to such as these [children]." Do you think that all children will enter the kingdom of God (heaven)?

This is an extremely difficult question and has been debated since the earliest days of the Christian church. There are four main views:

1. Free will. If you are born again and believe in Jesus, you will inherit the kingdom of God, i.e., go to heaven for all eternity. If you don't, you won't

2. Predestination. God has chosen those people who will go to heaven and if a very young child or even a fetus is a chosen one, he will go to heaven even if he has not professed his faith in Jesus.

3. God knows. We all have free will, but God knows which ones of us will accept Jesus, even at a very young age.

4. Love wins. God loves all of us so much, that unless we totally turn our back on him, we all go to heaven eventually.

Just so you know, my view is that #3 is correct, but you can find lots of support for any of the four. Take an example of children that die in birth or as very young babies. A highly-respected local Bible teacher believes that children of Christian parents go to heaven and children of Muslim parents go straight to hell.

14. What does it mean to "receive the kingdom of God like a little child?" (10:15) How can we have the attitude of a little child?

Although their parents brought them, how would the children have been toward Jesus? Trusting? Excited? Perhaps a little shy, not knowing quite what to expect.

Are we like little children? Have you ever noticed that you always know what little children are excited about? You know what has captured their heart. They blurt it out. They talk about it incessantly. They think about it all the time.

Are we childlike in our excitement about Jesus? Has he captured our hearts? Are we childlike in our enthusiastic devotion to him? Or have we grown up? Have we stripped our relationship with Jesus of its passion and replaced it with religion that's prim and proper. Have we lost our passion and enthusiasm for Jesus? Have we become dignified and dead?

15. What is the practical message from this short story with respect to our churches and Christian gatherings today? How can we apply it?

Steve no-last-name is pastor of the First Christian Church in Wray, a rural farming community on the northeastern plains of Colorado. He says:

Are we bringing people to Jesus for him to touch? Like those that brought the little children are we bringing people to Jesus? I assume Jesus has blessed you in some way. I assume you have experienced his touch on your life. That he has begun the process of transformation in your life. That he has saved you from a life of sin and hopelessness. That he has given you peace with God through faith in him. I assume that you have experienced the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Are you seeking to share that blessing with others? Are you inviting others to church? Are you investing in the lives of people who do not attend church. Do you have people in your life that you are investing in hopes of introducing them to Jesus Christ?

Conversely, are we hindering people from experiencing Jesus' touch in any way? Do we have attitudes or actions that prevent people from coming to Jesus? Sometimes we do this and don't even know it. Many times in churches, there is an unwritten code of conduct, of dress, of respectability, of status in the community, of influence. We are rarely aware of these unwritten codes. But we all live by them and we expect visitors to live by them as well. Without even knowing it, we may make others feel unwelcome or unwanted.

Along with these unwritten codes that make others feel unwelcome, Christians can also hinder others in their behavior throughout the week. Have you ever had someone say to you that they will never go to church because of all the hypocrites? Sadly, we all know that this charge against some in the church is true. And it should cause us all to take a long hard look at ourselves. Are we practicing what we preach? Are we living consistent, authentic lives all week long? Are we truly developing a relationship with Jesus Christ or are we being religious? Does the way you conduct your business draw people to Jesus? Or does it turn people off to Jesus? Does your home life draw people to Jesus? Does the way you manage anger demonstrate to others that you know Jesus?

The world is watching us. And they can't wait to point the finger at our failures, at our hypocrisy. But if we are consistent, if we practice what we preach, if we are growing in our walk with Jesus Christ, they will see that too. How we live our lives is vitally important to the witness of Jesus Christ in the world.

Along with our unwritten codes and our hypocrisy, we can often blatantly hinder others from coming to church. Sometimes as Christians and sadly in the name of Jesus, we are rude and judgmental. Many times we believe that Jesus has made us the moral police in the world and our job is to point out the sins of others. But if we are going to point the sins of others out, Jesus teaches we need to start with ourselves.

Mark 10:1-16 ~ Additional Discussion Questions

1. Why did the Pharisees go to see Jesus? How did they try to trick him? (10:2)
2. Why do you think that Jesus brought Moses into the discussion? (10:3)
3. How did Jesus explain Moses' instructions? (10:5) What do we know about the Pharisees from this explanation?
4. How did Jesus lend authority to his words? (10:6-9, Genesis 1:27, 2:24) Why do you think Jesus referred back to "the beginning of creation" in this debate?
5. How did Jesus protect women with his instructions? (10:11-12)
6. Why do you think so many marriages fail?
7. Do you think a strong Christian marriage can be an effective witness to unbelievers? Is it any better than a strong atheist marriage? How about a strong Muslim marriage or a strong Hindu marriage?
8. Why were people bringing their children to Jesus? (10:13)
9. What about the behavior of children does God want us to copy?
10. How can we receive the kingdom of God like a little child?
11. Are you in some way bringing others to Jesus? To church? To a Bible study? How are you reaching out to others? To those with less faith than you (or no faith)? What can you do this week to reach out to one specific non-believer?