

Grace, mercy and peace are yours in abundance through faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

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, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.’ 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.”

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. **This is God’s Word for God’s people.**

Dear Friends,

Quite a while ago, when our children were pretty small, Dawn and I had a will drawn up. We didn’t have a lot of assets but we did this because we wanted our children taken care of in case something happened to both of us. So we worked with a Christian lawyer that had been recommended to us.

We were somewhat surprised as we started to work on the details of who would take care of our children if we died. Our surprise was in the fact that this lawyer wanted us to write this will up assuming that whoever we picked would eventually divorce. After all, that was becoming the way of the world – keep in mind that this was almost 30 years ago. We didn’t take that piece of advice but rather we had our will written assuming that everyone was going to stay married. But that event opened our eyes to how the world looks at divorce. And now as I counsel young couples I am at times surprised because as they are preparing for marriage, some of them are also planning for divorce if it doesn’t work out. That’s the way of the world but today, as we consider this portion of scripture, we want to see what God’s Word has to say on this subject of divorce and marriage.

I. We shouldn't be surprised that the Pharisees were looking for ways to test Jesus. They were jealous because so many of the people were following him and the Pharisees didn't like his message because it contradicted theirs.

But it's interesting that the problem they brought up is still a problem in society today. Divorce must have been pretty prevalent at the time of Jesus. Historical writers state that a man could divorce his wife if she was quarrelsome or developed a bad reputation or if she was unable to have children and for various other reasons. All he had to do was issue her a decree of divorce and it was done. There was no court and no lawyers involved and no splitting of assets, however in some cases if there was a dowry given at the time of marriage it had to be returned to the wife, but the wife was the one who suffered in these cases.

So the Pharisees ask Jesus, **“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”** figuring that any answer he gave could be arguable but Jesus knew their hearts and so he answered with a question, **“What did Moses command you?”** In other words, what does the law say. Their law is the same as ours – it allows for it. But the bigger question then is, “Why?” and Jesus had that answer too, **“It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law.”**

In other words, God understands the sinful heart. God knows that people aren't always going to follow his Word. And so Civil Law often makes concessions to the weakness of mankind even though it is not pleasing to God. This law allowed for divorce rather than allowing wicked men to murder their wife or take other drastic action to somehow get rid of them if divorce wasn't possible. You might say that this law was meant to protect the innocent.

I would guess that most of us have been affected by divorce in one way or another. Maybe you yourself are divorced, or you have parents who are divorced, or siblings who are divorced. I have a brother and a sister who have gone through a divorce. It is allowed by our laws but is it right? People tell me things will be so much better after the divorce but as I see divorce – things change but many times it brings more difficulties than expected – it might make life better in some ways but it makes life harder in a lot of other ways. Once again, you might be asking yourself, if the law allows for it, “Why? Why does it make things harder?”

II. The disciples had more questions about this subject too. I don't know exactly what was included in their questions because scripture only records Jesus' answer. **“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.”** That's pretty harsh and if I

take it literally without considering the context then our town, our church and my family is filled with adulterous people. So what is Jesus saying?

We have to remember that as he referred to divorce he was talking about people who had hardened their hearts against God's Word and were intentionally going down a path of sin. The point here is if you chose this path and continue down it without recognizing your sin and repenting of it you are continuing to live in that sin and then you are committing adultery in a number of ways – not only by being unfaithful to your marriage vows but also by being unfaithful to God.

But what if there are biblical grounds for the divorce – what if a spouse is unfaithful or if one spouse deserts – then the other is not bound. But even in those cases we should remember that divorce always involves sin. A spouse commits the sin of adultery or desertion or a couple divorces for non-biblical reasons and where sin abounds there is also sadness and sorrow.

The good news is that when we repent of our sin there is forgiveness. Divorce is not an unforgiveable sin even though we give that impression at times. Jesus Christ paid for all our sins and even when we are involved in a divorce, as we turn to God he helps us to pick up the pieces and brings us healing and direction through his Word. As we turn to God's Word he helps us to forgive as we have been forgiven....that too, is part of the healing process and part of moving forward with our lives. Divorce is a subject we don't like to talk about but because it's so prevalent in our society we shouldn't ignore what God's Word has to say on the subject but we also want to listen to what Jesus has to say about marriage.

III. “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.⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” Our Old Testament lesson set the stage for marriage. It wasn't good for Adam to be alone and so God created Eve from Adam's rib and brought her to Adam. He immediately knew that God was instituting the first marriage.

Notice that God created one wife for Adam and this wife was a woman. God didn't create two men or two women or one man and multiple women – it was one man and one woman. Jesus also quoted Adam who said, **“For this reason,”** the reason of marriage a man will leave home and establish a new home with his wife and the two will become one. Physically and also one in

purpose and one as a family. But Jesus added something to Adam's original quote about marriage.

You might say that Jesus was giving the answer to the Pharisee's original question because Jesus said, **"What God has joined together, let man not separate."** God's design for marriage is that it be a lifelong union between one man and one woman. As society tries to move away from God it is also trying to change God's definition of marriage – that can only lead to trouble because it tears apart families – the basic building block of society.

So how do we keep our marriages healthy and pleasing in God's eyes? Work to make them last a lifetime. We can only do that if we have God at the center of our marriages so gather with your spouse around God's Word in your home and here at church. Worship together and pray together. And keeping in mind the sermons from previous weeks put your spouse first in your life right after God.

And for those of you who are single remember that God had a plan for Adam and he has a plan for you. It's not always apparent what that plan is but as you gather around God's Word at home and here in church he will take care of you. And even though you may not be married you are part of a family – your biological family but even more important your church family.

Let's keep God at the center of our lives and our marriages and let's listen to him as he speaks to us and as he guides us through our lives. Amen.