

Lust, Divorce, and Hardness of Heart – 1 Cor 7:10-11, Mark 10:1-12

Sexual Purity IV

Introduction – We live in a world riddled with the deep scars of hook-ups, no-fault divorce, serial polygamy, “friends with benefits,” and fatherless homes. These and other sexual sins are what God has given us over to because of our refusal to acknowledge Him as God and particularly as the One who created man, male and female, in His image and all that means in relation to sexuality and marriage. At the core, these sins are not the result of external props (Hollywood, porn, loose men and women), but rather they are issues of the heart (Matt 15:19). In the reformed world, we are taught to honor the gift of marriage. But we must not make an idol of it for marriage does not transform what you are, it amplifies who you are. There is no sanctifying grace in the act of marriage and so, when rebellious people get married, their sin amplifies in the marriage. Idols are harsh gods and so whether your idol is sexual pleasure or some view of the perfect marriage relationship, that idol will drain you empty. That is why God defined and regulated marriage and sexual purity in the way He did.

To the Married: Stay Married! (1 Cor 7:10-11) – Paul is addressing two covenant members here and he is reiterating what Jesus taught. If we have made an idol of married life we become tempted to think that our imperfect or difficult relationships must prove that we are not meant to remain in that one. Many otherwise so-called Bible-believing Christians (and counselors) believe that one can simply come to a point of “irreconcilable differences” in a broken marriage. But this is the whole point of taking public vows before God and men. This provides our emotions and actions with the foundation, security and accountability by which we can always reconcile and cultivate that which marriage is intended to provide and declare. Harmony in marriage is not due to natural compatibility (you just happened to marry the right person....or not); it is always the result of Christ-centered sanctification (dying to self, rejoicing always, letting the peace of God guard your heart and mind).

The Pursuit of Happiness – Here is where we trip up, showing forth our idolatries. We have no right to marital happiness. We do have the grace and privilege of joy in the Lord, but that is given and commanded in the midst of whatever Providence has brought. This is the wisdom of Job (Job 1:20-21). Whatever trials God brings, He is not wronging us. And in many marriages, the failure to recognize this fosters more and more discontent, bitterness and strife. What we so often fail to see is that God is tearing down our idols and revealing that we refuse to turn to Him and find our pleasures in Him (Matt 6:33, Psalm 16:11).

An Example from the Ministry of Jesus (Mark 10:1-12) – When the Pharisees came to ask this question about divorce, Mark tells us that they were “testing Him” (v2). This was a loaded question. A little background helps. John the Baptist had lost his life over this issue (Mark 6:17-19), and the Pharisees were in league with the Herodians to kill Jesus (3:6). But they disagreed over the issue of lawful divorce. The Pharisees held to the teaching of Rabbi Shammai who taught that a divorce could only be granted for sexual immorality (and only a husband could divorce a wife), while the Herodians held to the teaching of Rabbi Hillel who taught an early version of “no-fault” divorce, provided the paperwork was all in order. If Jesus openly agreed with the Pharisees, they could turn the Herodians on Him. If He agreed with the Herodians, the Pharisees would accuse Him of a low view of the law. “Lose-lose,” they thought..

What Moses Said/All of Moses – Christ appeals to neither rabbinic tradition. He appeals to Moses’ regulation in Deut 24:1-4 and more importantly, to the reason of that regulation: “*because of the hardness of your heart.*” Divorce occurs because of the sin of at least one party. Pause here and note that it has always been the way of the hard-hearted to try and redefine the covenant of marriage as well as the definition of sexual purity.

After quoting Moses from Deuteronomy, Jesus quotes Moses’ writings from Genesis, from the time of the creation order (vv5-9). A marriage covenant is a solemn bond, sovereignly administered, with attendant blessings and curses. It cannot be redefined by man and it cannot be regulated except by God’s law. You and your neighbor could agree to tear down an ugly fence you built together, but you and your wife cannot decide to tear down your marriage. You didn’t build it. God did. It is a sin to separate what God has joined together.

Bothered Disciples (vv10-11) – It appears the disciples themselves were a bit taken aback by what Jesus said (and compare Matt 19:10). Jesus stood on the Word of God rightly divided regardless of what the Pharisees, the Herodians, or even His own disciples might think. This reveals where our first loyalty must always fall – and reveals the way to repentance, reconciliation and restoration in many, many broken marriages.

Hardness of Heart – “So where’s the *exception clause*,” the gnat-stranglers want to know. Did Mark forget what Matthew records (Matt 5:31-32, 19:8-9)? I believe Mark sees that all conflated in the phrase, “*hardness of heart.*” We can get ourselves so messed up, but it is never too late to repent. It is sometimes too late to fix that which has been wrecked. But if a marriage is to be dissolved it must be dissolved by the Word of God and not by our own desires, devices or laws.

The Creation Order and the Gospel – The first Adam was given a wife and it was to be forever until sin entered the picture. But we must cultivate the creation order taking into account our fallenness and the death, burial and resurrection of the second Adam. Jesus is restoring Eden and even going beyond (Rom 5:17). A conservative view of sexuality, marriage and divorce does not guarantee a harmonious marriage; these may only be pharisaical signals. For men and women who are first and only trusting in Christ, His sanctifying grace can bring tremendous healing, reconciliation and restoration.