

Matt Henry
Mark 10:2-16
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“Love and Marriage”

Grace and peace...

(sung) “Love and marriage, love and marriage, go together like a horse and carriage” Some of you know that’s Frank Sinatra. Other generations might be thinking of his song as the opening credits to “Married with Children”. Whatever your cultural reference is, we all have our own experiences and perspectives on what a marriage should look like and what a family should be like. Jesus has his own opinion too which He lays out in Mark 10. Here the context is divorce. But in our postmodern culture, it’s amazing to me how we could apply the concept of male/female much more widely. This should be part of our conversations when we talk about gender and identity, marriage, sex. These are all given as part of God’s male-female design for life. They’re all connected. You mess with one, you’re messing with the other. In our society the repercussions of departing from His design are profound. For our faith, families and future generations, we must do what Jesus did when he was tested by the Pharisees: offer an answer that doesn’t get bogged down in any particular issue, but transcends human wisdom by honoring the design God first gave in creation. That’s the move we have to make because that’s the move Jesus made.

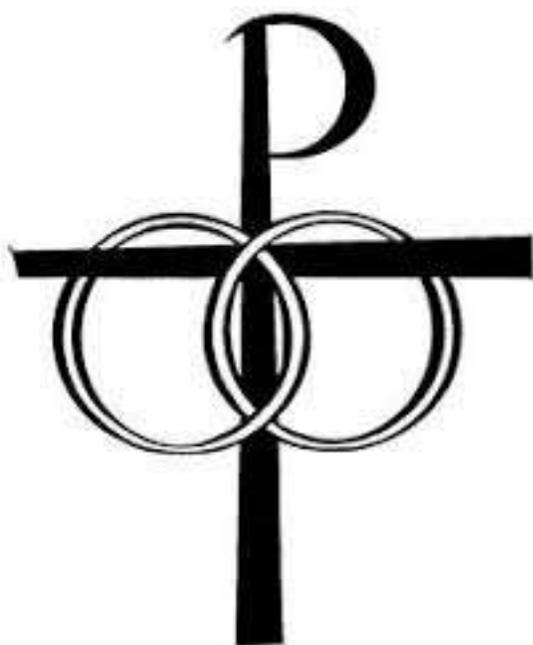
He quotes Genesis: “God made them male and female.” It’s basic biology, basic facts, but that hasn’t stopped the embracing of an ideology that is self-constructed. So regardless of our positions on the issues, the real decision here is who is the better Maker? God or man?

This has huge implications for society as more people begin to choose the latter. I would even say we have only begun to feel the effects. But the real damage from straying from God’s design on marriage, family, is going to be greater with the generational turnover. We’re going to have greater confusion and hurt because no matter what we come up with, it’s not going to be better than God’s design for life.

So let me say at the outset, this text is about imparting the general will of God. It is not about specific situations. The human reflex will be to say “Well what about this?” and come up with a specific circumstance. You just have to put away the “what abouts” because we’re not talking about “what abouts”. If you want particulars read 1 Cor 7. Jesus is talking here about what marriage is. This is his teaching on the permanence and enduring lifelong quality that marriage is meant to have between a man and a woman. Jesus’ goal was to confront and overturn a worldview. His goal wasn’t to offend. Just as my goal is not to offend. Let’s just be real about what marriage looks like.



[IMAGE of man bowing down before woman and handing her his money.] Oh, I'm way off base am I? Or maybe this should be the image of marriage [bulletin cover: two rings interlinked and centered on the cross.] That's what marriage is meant to look like.



So let's get to the scene in Mark 10. What better characters to foil than the Pharisees. You may not know this, but I learned recently there were actually two schools of Pharisees. One was called Shammai and the other Hillel. I won't go into too much detail, but we know that Shammai was very legalistic, conservative.

They cared about keeping the law. The other school was Hillel. They were much more loose, liberal. Anything went. They cared about justice and the people. Just know there was this division of Pharisees. So when a group of them comes up to Jesus one day, to test him and perhaps trap him in his words, and asks, “Is it lawful?” which group of Pharisees do you think we’re dealing with here? It’s the Shammai. That’s their favorite question, by the way. Not is it right?, is it moral?, is it God’s will? They don’t care about that. They care about the law being fulfilled—and not just the law—but their ever-widening and expansive interpretation of the law. That’s the theological context.

The political context is that we have Herod Antipas reigning in the background as Roman governor over Galilee. He divorced his wife in order to marry Herodias, his brother’s wife. John the Baptist said, “No way Jose” and that’s what got him beheaded. So this is the trap the Shammai Pharisees lay for Jesus. If Jesus says it’s unlawful for a man to divorce his wife, he might suffer the same fate as John the Baptist. If Jesus says it’s lawful, then he would go against the Torah and be subject to the charge of blasphemy.

So to avoid their trap, Jesus answers their question with a question, “What did Moses command you?” And they said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” The Pharisees are quoting from

Deuteronomy 24:1, where it describes a man divorcing his wife if he found something objectionable about her. But it's not a license for divorce, it's actually a very specific circumstance that Moses was giving about not permitting a woman to remarry her first husband after being divorced from her second husband. Jesus says it was because of the hardness of their hearts that Moses wrote that commandment. So, Jesus, being the smart guy that He is, reaches for an even greater authority than Moses—God Himself. At the beginning. In Genesis. "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Then Jesus adds on His own, "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." There's no exception clause. It's the uncomplicated, not vague at all will of God.

We complicate it because we want to introduce certain conditions. I'm sure that's why the disciples raised the issue more with Jesus inside the house. "But Lord, what about?" But what we are talking about is the nature of marriage as this resolute commitment from both parties that the lifelong union of marriage is God-designed, God-favored and God-sustained. Divorce is not God's will because that would make God inconsistent. He would be opposing His own work of the one flesh creation. In the house he says, "Whoever divorces his wife and

marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery (against him).” Now that interesting that a woman could initiate a divorce, because that would imply some standing and rights. And whatever standing is here is an indication of Greek influence, or Hellenization, on Jewish culture. Bottom line, Jesus says it’s wrong to leave the one you promised to be faithful to because you seek another.

As a pastor, I’ve sat with couples who are coping with infidelity. Sometimes they make it through by choosing to forgive and slowly trust is rebuilt after some serious boundary work and confession. I’ve seen other couples just divorce and move on as best they can. But I have yet to see anyone win in a divorce. It’s because there are no winners. And the ones who lose out the most are the children—even when they are grown. Speaking of children, what are the chances that in Mark 10, the proper treatment of children would follow this section on marriage? Why, it’s almost like marriage and family go together and in order! It’s like the rhyme, “first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in the baby carriage.”

You know the text. The disciples try to send the children away, but Jesus rebukes them and says, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.” Why does Jesus say that? Is it because

children are so precious? Is it because they are unable and weak? Is it because they are innocent and deserving of protection? Or does Jesus say the kingdom belongs to the children because they are full of potential? What's the best answer? Winner gets a certificate for their kid to eat free at IHOP.

First-century Jewish culture, children are regarded as helpless, unwise, unable and weak. Those are the qualities that children embody. Helplessness, weakness, lacking wisdom, lacking ability. They are defined by what they cannot do. And Jesus says to those types of people, who have nothing to offer God, He gives them the kingdom. "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." For this is the Gospel—the kingdom or reign of God is not earned or dependent upon our smarts, our status or strength. It is given by our Savior. He has a place for people who have a place for Him.

The children end up looking a lot smarter and a lot happier than the learned Pharisees. The Pharisees came to Jesus to hold him down. The children came to be held. The children recognized their need for Jesus. And they delighted in Jesus as He delighted in them.

When it comes to having the best design for love and marriage, identity, sex, family, the worldview that leads to happiness and life, the answer for all of

them is in Genesis. Frank Sinatra lyrics in Love and Marriage, were “try, try, try, to separate them—it’s an illusion.” It’s an illusion that the world has completely bought into. They may come to learn too late. But we as the church, we know that God’s ways are always better. We just can’t outdo God’s design for us and for life. What God has joined together—including marriage and every other designed element of life together—let man not separate.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.