

The Test  
Mark 10:2-16

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Divorce touches most everyone's life. Just as today, Divorce was a touchy subject even in Jesus' day. The Pharisees come to test Jesus asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" So you would think that we are going to talk about whether or not it is right to divorce from this text. But before you get into that long spiritual, ethical, and moral debate over divorce if it is right or not let me read to you one more text today: from Deuteronomy 24: The Law of Moses, the Torah of the Jews: "Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house and goes off to become another man's wife. Then suppose the second man dislikes her, writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house (or the second man who married her dies); her first husband, who sent her away, is not permitted to take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled for that would be abhorrent to the Lord, and you shall not bring guilt on the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession."

The Pharisees that came to test Jesus that day knew this text from their own sacred laws. The priests of the temple and the synagogues lived day to day studying and memorizing and interpreting the Law of Moses. So when they come to Jesus they already know the answer to their question. Because right there in Deuteronomy 24, Moses says that a man can divorce his wife by writing her a certificate of divorce and sending her out of his house. Remember please, this is before women could own property; before women had equal rights; before modern day divorce laws and such that helped equalize the situation. But with all that aside, we have to realize here that the Pharisees already knew the answer they were coming to Jesus with. This Gospel text isn't so much about if Jesus thinks it is lawful or not, it is rather about what opinion, what side of the discussion will Jesus come down on. They wanted to know which party he was a member of, he couldn't be both and so he would be trapped.

In Jesus' day it was pretty much the same thing. There were two parties, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, they didn't run the country like a political party, the Roman emperor and his governor Pilate ran the country. But they did have the control of people's religious life.

And they wanted their views to win out, and they wanted the power. One of the issues the two parties debated over was the issue of divorce. There were two parties of thought in Jesus' day, the Shammi or the Hillel.

The first train of thought was the Shammi. It allowed for a man to write a certificate of divorce for his wife if there was sexual misconduct on behalf of the woman with another man. Now the strictest interpretation of this was divorce by killing, for if a married woman was caught with another married man in the act of adultery according to the law they deserved death. But instead they had written in certain guidelines to this law and if those strict guidelines were observed and the breaking of these laws could be proved it was permissible for a man to divorce his wife by writing a certificate of divorce and putting her out of the house.

Now the other train of thought was what they called Hillel. This idea was that a man could write a certificate of divorce and give it to his wife and shut her out of his house over any thing that was shameful or disrespectful. This rule was not as detailed and didn't need eyewitnesses or any reason for that matter. It was interpreted very broadly and allowed for divorce for any reason that the husband could think of. This included the burning of toast, or the wrong dish was bought, or just if the man saw another woman that he wanted more. – Whatever the reason this interpretation allowed for divorce based on no real reason.

So you can imagine that the difference in these two schools of thoughts was extreme. Which one would Jesus choose is the real question put out here in our Gospel reading. It wasn't a question about marriage or if divorce was legal, because both parties allowed for divorce, they just wanted Jesus to choose a side. If they could get Jesus to take a side, then he would have some people riled against him, because they knew that you could not please all the people all the time, so they came to test him, knowing full well the two trains of thought on this issue.

Now we get to Jesus' answer. Jesus knows they know the Law of Moses. And so he asks them what does Moses command you? And they answer him, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." As soon as they answer this question we know where they stood. They are of the Hillel party. Remember Deuteronomy 24, that I read to you earlier, said that a man can divorce his wife, but the text says that there must be a reason of objection. The Pharisees in their answer leave this part out and so Jesus knows right away

where they stand on this issue. They are basically saying that we think Moses said we can divorce for whatever reason.

So Jesus challenges them, he comes right back and refutes their understanding of why Moses even had to deal with this issue. It was because of your sinfulness, your hard hearts that this was allowed. Jesus basically is saying right there that divorce is not right, it is not good, it is painful, it hurts, it separates, and divides. It is sinful, and sinfulness is not God's intention for humanity. "God in the beginning made them male and female, for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate" Jesus' answer is about relationships rather than the legal aspect of the torah. He even goes into the house and explains it further to his disciples. Telling them that "anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." Jesus knows that divorce has been legal. That is a given like if I said 18 year olds are not allowed to drink. You would all know that I meant not drink alcohol, but I didn't say that it is simply implied because it is the common law of the land. Jesus knows the legal law of the land is to allow divorce, but his answer is about the relationship and not the legal understanding. He is saying it is wrong for men to divorce their wives for any silly reason. Woman divorced from husbands, it was out of hand. And Jesus reminds them of the relationship once again that God intended and promised. He doesn't need to qualify it further.

He simply uses scripture, God created man and woman to work together, to live together, to be one. Our human sinfulness, that forced us to fall from God's grace in the garden, has split us apart from God's intentions over and over and over again. We sin, we have harden our hearts in many ways to God, and divorce is another example of that here.

That's why the very next part of our text is about the little children coming to Jesus, but the disciples rebuke them. Can you imagine their comments? "He is too busy to bother with you." "He is the Messiah, he doesn't have time to deal with young children." "He has more important things to do." This is another example of our Hardened Hearts.

The disciples just don't see it. God would have us come to him as innocent children, in that loving relationship without barriers without things that divide us, without the hardness of hearts that we grow up into with our biases, opinionated, slanted views. Our sinfulness,

has turned us away from God, driven us away from what he would want us to be. It has turned us and broken us with his creation. And this entire text here is to remind us that we are to become like that innocent little child who is trusting, open and loving, without hindrance or doubts, without having to qualify or judge or set up guidelines of righteousness of who is right and who is not.

This sermon is not about marriage and divorce. It is not even about the lawfulness and rules attributed to divorce. What this text is truly about is to remember we are all sinners, we have our hardened hearts and try to qualify our lives and Jesus reminds us that we have broken with God's will and that we should instead turn and become like the innocent little children, loving and opened to all that God, the Father would will for us in this creation. There is forgiveness and redemption through the relationship won for us in Jesus Christ, may we learn to live in it, now and always.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. AMEN.

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Heavenly Father We turn to the cross, and see the sinfulness of our lives, the pains and the rebellions that we have caused your heart as we over and over again have turned away from your will and your love. We have broken from your will in divorce, in war, in anger, in greed, in so many ways. We look to that cross and see the love that you had for us, so much so that you were willing to send your own son to hang on that cross as our Sacrifice, so that we who believe might be washed clean of the sins and made new and righteous before you. We give you thanks for this great gift this day.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

God almighty, with the cross always before us, may we see the glory of your grace. May all of humanity turn towards you and give thanks that you have forgiven us, and saved us. Continue to inspire us with the symbols of the faith, to draw us closer to you and to always see that grace as the foundation of our faith so that we may grow in you into eternity. Inspire your Church to look towards your cross and be witnesses of your redeeming love. Use us as you will Lord, we are your servants, we are your church, we are yours unable to do anything without you on our side.

Lord in your Mercy, hear our prayer.

God, Grant wisdom and strength to the nations of this world. Empower this world to feel the peace of your glory that flows out from your throne. May it sweep down to cover this world and wash away all pain and anguish, all suffering and disasters. May it end war and hatred. May it give peace and security to those who feel helpless and alone. May you continue to be with those facing hunger and diseases that kill so many people around the world this very hour. Empower your people to hear the cry of our fellow man, to reach out in Christian love and to give aid and support to those in need around the world and here at home in our own families and neighbors.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Almighty Lord, we turn to you in suffering and hurt. You are the great healer and comforter of all those in need. You give healing and hope, you give life and joy. Take away the pains and sufferings from all those dealing with hardships this day. Be with our shut-ins, the hospitalized and the lost and forgotten, be with us Lord and especially Ann Bevins, Ron Wolf, Howell Crawford and all those we lift up in our prayers to you now...

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

Into your hands, O lord we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.