



## THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Study Guide Full  
Mark 10:1-12  
March 1, 2020

As we enter this Lenten season, heading toward Jerusalem in Mark's gospel, we continue on in Mark 10 with Jesus' proclamations about the nature of true cruciform (cross-shaped) discipleship.

Previously, at the end of Mark 9, we saw the ethic of "being last" in terms of an ethic of hospitality and cooperation among Christ's disciples, and we also saw there the truth of death and resurrection in the call for a kind of spiritual surgery to maintain our "salty flavour" in the world.

These themes resonate this week as the Pharisees approach Jesus to entrap him in a rabbinic discussion of marriage and divorce. But Jesus will not fall into this trap; instead, "as was his custom" he will teach—and teach with authority. He will set the record straight as he paints the beautiful picture of marriage and of male and female relations as God has always intended.

*10 And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them.*

*2 And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" 3 He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" 4 They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." 5 And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. 6 But from the*



beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'

7 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, 8 and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

10 And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 11 And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, 12 and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

## Mark 10:1-12

Notes:



"And God said let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness." — Genesis 1:26

Stained glass, Latin, location unknown  
(cbeinternational.org)

### Commentary Notes:

v. 1. Mark last locates Jesus in Capernaum, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, in Mark 9:33. Now Jesus has traveled southward to teach, as the gospel will reach its climax in Jerusalem of Judea. At some point he crossed over the Jordan River into the area known as Perea.

### Discussion Questions:

*Reflect:* What has Jesus been teaching you throughout Markan series? Beginning by reviewing, encourage one another in your sharing.

v. 2. Most Jews agreed that divorce was permitted, as in Dt. 24:1; the question up for debate, particularly between the Jewish rabbinic schools of Shammai and Hillel, was what the “some indecency” of that verse meant. Yet, Mark makes clear here that the Pharisee inquiry is just a trap; keep in mind that Perea was the region of Herod Antipas—remember what happened in Mark 6?

vv. 3-4. Jesus responds to the Jewish leaders as he often does, answering a question with one of his own. Sensing their ill intent and anticipating their rabbinic line of thought, Jesus sets the stage for the teaching moment to come in the following verses. He will put the Deuteronomy verses in their true context, looking beyond the Mosaic provision that assumes the practice of divorce.

v. 5. Jesus makes clear what this conversation is truly about—their hardness of heart! As Mark Strauss notes in his Expositor’s commentary: “God’s allowance for divorce was an attempt to bring some sort of order in a society that had disregarded God’s standards. But God did not intend for marriage to end in divorce...The rabbis mistook God’s

*Discuss:* In considering this text, it is helpful to first consider the cultural milieu in which we live: How does contemporary culture in Vancouver view marriage? What does our culture teach us about “Happily ever after...”? What does it teach us about divorce? What does it teach us about singlehood?

*Study:* Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4. With regards to your modern mindset and sensibilities, how do those verses strike you? What if you tried to look at them through an ancient mindset (see question below)?

*Study:* Consult the other gospel references to divorce, Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. What is the overall ethic of marriage and divorce seen in these passages?

*Study:* What do you know about marriage and divorce in the ancient world? It might be helpful to simply “Google” “Divorce in ancient Rome”. Along these lines, consider reading the chapter “Appeals to Women” from Rodney Stark’s *The Triumph of Christianity*. How does awareness of ancient cultural context put Jesus’ words here into greater focus?

*Lament:* As a group, lament the state of marriage in our culture—that it is often entered into lightly, and that rarely do we emphasize the intense character work that marriage demands. Lament the reality of marriage in the church—that for most of us, divorce has touched us closely in some way or another. Lament the reality of singlehood in our culture—that we live in an era where “image” reigns. Lament the reality of singlehood in our church—that too often we marginalize the life of singles in our church. In

gracious provision in allowing divorce as his approval of it.

**vv. 6-9.** The authority of Jesus is clearly on display here in his teaching, as he offers context to Mosaic instruction, and correction to the rabbinic debate: he takes the discussion back to the beginning of creation, turning back the page to Genesis 1-2—a picture of mutual love.

Tertullian, the 2nd-century African theological heavyweight, writes beautifully of these verses: “What kind of yoke is that of two believers who share one hope, one desire, one discipline, one service? They enjoy kinship in spirit in flesh. They are mutual servants with no discrepancy of interests. Truly they are ‘two in one flesh.’ Where the flesh is one, the spirit is one as well...They stand equally at the banquet of God, equally in crises, equally facing persecutions, and equally in being refreshed. Neither hides anything from the other. Neither neglects the other. Neither is troublesome to the other.”

**vv. 10-12.** Jesus continues in the counter-cultural nature of his teaching. As God has made male and female, so are husband and wife under the same moral obligation; in rabbinic Judaism, a man could never commit adultery against his own wife, no matter his actions! Here, Jesus again elevates the dignity of women.

prayer, mournfully express to God our collective sorrow over the collective state of things.

*Confess:* Whether you are single or married, divorced or widowed, we have all made promises that we have made with the best intentions, yet have not kept, for whatever reasons. Spend some time silently searching your heart, and confess to God your sorrow over those promises unfulfilled, whether to him or to others. Rest assured that there is nothing that can divorce us from God’s love. If you feel comfortable, share with one another out of your weakness.

*Discuss:* In the portrait of mutual love and respect that Jesus paints here (see Tertullian’s comments aside), we see an image of human relationality that we would do well to extrapolate beyond the this discussion and the context of marriage. In this sense, discuss: What does this passage have to teach to we who are single? What does it have to teach we who are dating? What does it have to teach we who are divorced? We who are widowed?

*Meditate:* Athony described the context of this marriage discussion as one of servant discipleship. What is the Spirit speaking to you this week about servant discipleship?

*Pray:* Pray for our FBC marriages; for our singles; for our widows; for our ones divorced; for our youth—that we would be marked not by a “hardness of heart” but His warmth and care.