

Your Hearts were Hard

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Text: Matt 19:1-12

The family is under attack - has been for decades. Destroying the nuclear family has been a goal of tyrants since very early times. The Assyrian empire (think Jonah) was very cruel, but one characteristic of the Assyrians is that when they conquered a nation, they dispersed it's people across the empire, separating them so they could not form communities. The Assyrians separated children from their parents and wives from their husbands, knowing that conquered peoples were easier to control if the basic units of society were destroyed.

It was the tactic of the Communists after the Bolshevik Revolution. Children were made wards of the state, separated from their parents from the cradle. Millions of Ukrainian children were made orphans in this manner - taken from their parents and placed in state-run orphanages, where the children could be trained "properly" according to Communist dogma. In fact, Vladimir Putin recently said that he planned to take 30,000 Ukrainian children away from their parents and move them into Russia.

It is the tactic of the political left in the USA. It began with the welfare system, rewarding single mothers and breaking up families. We had a family in one church where the father was unemployed and applied for welfare. The officials told the wife that she and the children could get benefits so long as the father moved out of the home. The welfare system is largely to blame for the destruction of the black family, giving benefits to unmarried mothers. The "elephant in the room", so to speak, for the black community is fatherless homes, where young men do not have a father figure to guide them into authentic manhood. They turn to gangs for their male influence, which is a major source of crime.

Another part of the problem was the advent of "no-fault" divorce. Couples could divorce for any reason at all – even silly reasons such as "incompatibility" or "we fell out of love." This has led to a crisis of marriage and family today where young women marry, get what they want, and then leave, taking the children, alimony and child support. Young men are reluctant to marry, because they see the odds are stacked against them. Why would they invest their lives in something that, in all likelihood, is going to be ripped away from them in five years or less? The average length of marriage in the US is about eight years for those that end in divorce.

It's also the tactic of feminism and the sexual revolution. We see the public schools hiding the mental health problems of children from parents, and our own governor signed a law that removes provisions "requiring notice when a child gets non-emergency medical services or treatment at school" and "changed standards around immediately notifying parents of when their child is questioned by police, or if their child is the victim of – or perpetrated – a crime."¹ It gives public schools a window of 48 hours before they have to notify parents. Your child may be detained by the

¹<https://www.fox13seattle.com/news/washington-changes-parental-rights-education>

police without you being notified. Imagine the anxiety when your child does not come home from school and no one will tell you where they are. There are also laws now in place in California, Colorado, and perhaps others that punish parents for not affirming their child's "gender identity." That is, if your son decides he wants to be a girl and you object, that child can be taken from you by the state and placed in an affirming home. "Courts have removed children from loving homes in Indiana, Ohio, California, and Illinois."²

It is part of the agenda of the LGBTQ movement, not of many homosexual people themselves, mind you, but the political radical movement, to redefine marriage, indoctrinate children away from traditional family structure, and demonize particularly the Christian concept of marriage and family. And it is more pervasive than you may think.

Let me shift gears just a bit. A common argument these days is the logical fallacy of an argument from silence. It goes like this: "Jesus didn't say anything about abortion, therefore, abortion must be okay. If it were wrong, Jesus would have said something." Or, "Jesus didn't say anything about homosexuality, therefore ..." and the argument goes the same way. The problem is that we don't know what Jesus didn't say. John wrote that *Jesus did many other things as well* (Jn 21:25), more than he has had space to record. The implication must be that Jesus also said many other things as well, which have not been recorded. The other problem we have is that of necessity. Why might Jesus not have addressed some subjects, say abortion? Abortion was rampant in that time, but in Roman and Greek societies. But it was not practiced in Jewish culture, so Jesus would not have needed to speak against something that wasn't occurring. Likewise, homosexuality was not acceptable in Jewish society so it was not something Jesus needed to address. Jesus does address divorce. Let's see how.

Some Pharisees ask, "*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?*" Some of those reasons were that she burnt his meal, salted his food too much - or not enough, didn't keep house the way he liked, or he just grew tired of her. We might think of some of their excuses as silly, but they are no sillier than reasons often given today.

And Jesus responded from the Scripture: "*Haven't you read ... that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female* (Gen 1:27), *and said, 'for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'* (Gen 2:24). *So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.*" God's creation was binary - male and female - all throughout nature: birds, fish, alligators, cattle. But with humans, the creation account specifically states that God made them male and female, and then brought them together in the first marriage.

Divorce is difficult on an emotional level, certainly, but also on a physical level. "In the last decade, two strands of research have emerged that ... provide clinical proof that two people in love are no longer separate organisms: a niche group of neurobiologists have shown that the hearts, brains, and organs of couples synchronize their activity ..."³ Husband and wife don't become one body, or one person, or identical to each other, but they become one flesh, and the woman's physical

²<https://www.carolinajournal.com/opinion/state-shouldnt-seize-children-from-parents-over-differing-gender-views/>

³<https://www.countere.com/home/neuroscience-of-love-two-lover-become-one-flesh>

nature responds uniquely to her husband. Studies show that married men and women heal from injuries more quickly than their unmarried counterparts.⁴ When God said that the two become one flesh, he did not mean only in an emotional or spiritual manner. In the acts of marriage, the consummation of marriage, God joins husband and wife into one flesh. So, Jesus says, “What God has joined ...” or what God has combined ...” This is one reason why we must take marriage much more seriously than we have.

So, why then, they ask, “*did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?*” First of all, Moses commanded no such thing. There is no command in the Bible for divorce. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 reflects on a custom. This was how it was done: If a man was displeased with his wife he would write a certificate nullifying their marriage, hand it to the wife and send her away. But what Moses is telling them is that if a man does this and the woman goes away and marries another, and he, too, become displeased and sends her away, the first man is not allowed to remarry that woman. But writing a certificate of divorce and sending the wife away was not part of God’s plan to begin with. *What God has joined* was intended to be inseparable, for the simple reason that *the two become one flesh*. They are, Jesus said, *no longer two* to be separated at all. Moses didn’t command, but he did allow divorce. Why? Because their hearts were hard. Because they were selfish, and lacked compassion or love for one another. And that is our condition, too.

A lot of divorce happens because of disagreement over finances. There has been a growing trend of separate bank accounts, prenuptial agreements, and financial contracts between couples as each tries to protect their money, their assets from the other. But if the two become one, there should be no separate accounts. If both work, both deposit into the same account; both agree on financial priorities; neither spends without the other’s knowledge (at least!); and bills are paid out of the common account. Our marriage vows are to “love, comfort, honor, and keep.” A huge part of love is trust; a huge part of honor is trust. The reason for financial stress is often a lack of trust on the part of one or both. And lack of trust is accompanied by selfishness: I don’t trust you to manage my money, so I’ll manage mine and you manage yours. You pay your share; I’ll pay my share. But there are no “shares” in marriage as God intended.

Jesus goes on: “*I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.*” Both here and in Matthew 5:31-32, Jesus excepts adultery, sexual immorality, from the prohibition on divorce. Now, let me just note that Jesus was talking to men in a society where women did not have these sorts of rights. Only men could divorce their wives, and the wife was not released from the marriage unless the husband approved. A woman was not allowed to divorce her husband – that would solve perhaps 90% of the divorce problem in the US. Studies show that 70% of all divorces are filed by the wife.⁵ They feel emotionally disconnected from their spouse, they have stronger support systems and more friends than their husbands, they feel they have less to lose because they get custody of the children and financial support, and they struggle with gender roles in the home against the demands of the workplace. And, by the way, stay-at-home moms generally don’t have those problems.

You might look at all this the way Jesus’ disciples did. It might then be better not to marry at all. If the marriage vow is so strict and God’s demands on the husband so severe, maybe it’s better

⁴<https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-20121555.html>

⁵<https://www.asanet.org/women-more-likely-men-initiate-divorces-not-non-marital-breakups/#:~:text=As%20part%20of%20his%20analysis,equal%20levels%20of%20relationship%20quality.>

to stay single. Well, I haven't talked at all about those who remain single, but the statistics are not good. Never married and divorced people report less satisfaction with life in general. They are lonelier, less happy, and have shorter life spans, according to reports I've seen.^{6, 7}

Jesus' response is this: it may be better for some not to marry. Not everyone is cut out for marriage. Jesus uses the word for *eunuch*, one who is sterile and cannot father children. This word has three basic meanings: one who has been castrated, one who is sterile by nature, and one who stays celibate by choice. Jesus uses all three: there are those who were born that way; those who were made that way, and those who choose to live that way for the sake of the kingdom. The third category, by the way, refers specifically to those whose passion for ministry and whose particular mission would make marriage untenable. That's one reason the Catholic church, in particular, requires a celibate priesthood – so that priests can give their whole attention to ministry and are not burdened or distracted by family issues. There have been those among their ranks who have not, in Jesus' words, been able to accept that. Paul advised the church at Corinth regarding marriage in 1 Corinthians 7. There's a lot more there than we have time for this morning, but part of his concern is what he considered to be the imminent return of Christ. He has this to say about celibacy: *But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion* (1 Cor 7:9). We might expand that last “burn with passion” to read “burn with passionate lust.” That's what has caused so much trouble, so much distraction, and the destruction of so much ministry. Some are able to live celibate lives; many are not.

Here's the key to all that Jesus says here: Marriage was God's idea; divorce was man's idea. God takes marriage seriously, so seriously in fact that he performed the first wedding, and then gave the Israelites rules for how marriage was supposed to work (Lev 21; Nu 36; Dt 20-25), and a command to not commit adultery, that is, do not violate your marriage vows. God takes marriage so seriously that he compares adultery and idolatry, and when Israel strayed in idolatry God accused them of adultery, of taking other lovers. Then he used Hosea to demonstrate how he views his bride, Israel, in spite of their wandering. And Paul used the relationship between Christ and the Church as the pattern for marriage (Eph 5:21-33).

What Jesus is telling us is this: you are citizens of the kingdom; live as citizens of the kingdom. You have prayed, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”; your prayer is answered in the way you respond to God's will.

⁶<https://news.gallup.com/poll/642590/married-americans-thriving-higher-rates-unmarried-adults.aspx>

⁷<https://www.norc.oregonstate.edu/research/library/married-older-adults-enjoy-stronger-connections-and-greater-relationship-satisfaction-than-unmarried-peers.html>