

Leaving, Cleaving and Weaving

Mark 10:1-16

Rev. Brian Bill

February 25-26, 2017

We all wear many hats. Here are three that I put on.

- **Pastor.** As one of your pastors I have the joy of shepherding God's sheep. Sometimes this involves ministering to people in pain and helping them through the hurts and heartaches of life. 1 Peter 5:2: ***"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you."***
- **Preacher.** I also have the pleasure of proclaiming the Word of God. This involves faithful study of the Scriptures so that I communicate exactly what God has declared in His Word. I'm humbled by the admonition in 1 Peter 4:11: ***"Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God."***
- **Person.** I echo what the Apostle Paul declared in 1 Timothy 1:15: ***"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."*** I am a person with problems and a sinner saved by grace. The first time I spoke at Celebrate Recovery I stood up and said, *"Hi, my name is Brian and I'm a sinner."* The response was immediate as they warmly responded, *"Hi Brian!"* Recently I was with two Edgewood members who invited someone to gather with us in one of our services. One of the guys said something like this: *"We're a church filled with sinners and we'd love to have you join us."* Right on.

These roles work together well but there is some inherent tension in them. While I'm called to have compassion as a pastor I'm also constrained to communicate what the Bible teaches as a preacher. When we come to passages that are counter-cultural and even controversial, I'm committed to declare what the Bible teaches. My aim is to do so truthfully in a spirit of grace, knowing that I am a person with problems myself.

Jesus is not always "politically correct" but He is always perfectly correct. We must settle whether we will follow what Scripture says or what society says. We will not compromise by caving to culture nor will we clobber sinners. We're called to be like Jesus who was ***"full of grace and truth."*** (John 1:14)

As I mentioned last weekend when going through books of the Bible verse-by-verse, we're forced to tackle topics that we might not choose on our own. If you want to watch, listen or read the message that dealt with the topic of sin and hell, simply jump on the Edgewood app or go to edgewoodbaptist.net. Here's a summary of what we learned from the closing verses of Mark 9.

- Avoid causing a follower of Christ to sin
- Cut off anything that causes you to sin
- Live out the cause of Christ

Our topic today comes right from our text for today – marriage and divorce. This brings up all sorts of feelings, doesn't it? Some of you are single and wish you were married and there are some who are married who wish they were single. Some of you have lost your spouse and this topic is terribly difficult for you.

Before we go much further, to those who are single, please forgive us for making you feel second-class or unimportant – whether that's been done inadvertently or intentionally. It's wrong when we put pressure on you to get married, or make disparaging comments, or tease you, or just leave you out of things. We must stop.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that married-couple households have slipped from nearly 80 percent in the 1950s to less than 50 percent today. In an article entitled, "Bowling (and Living) Alone," The Wall Street Journal reports that the nuclear family of two parents and their children is no longer the most common living arrangement. In its place are "single-adult" households. According to census figures, the largest chunk of American households now consists of people who live alone.

Many of you have experienced the pain of divorce. You may have sorrow, loss, regret, relief, anger, guilt, shame, fear, depression, confusion, disappointment, bitterness, or a combination of all these and more. One pastor writes, *"There are few things more painful than divorce. It cuts to the depths of personhood unlike any other relational gash."*

Forgive us as a church for treating divorce as the unforgivable sin. We don't know what you've been through or what you are going through right now. I like what Kyle Idleman says in his new book *Grace is Greater*, *"People need us to raise a hand, not point a finger. They need to hear, 'Me too. I'm broken too.'"*

If you are divorced and remarried, God wants to help you make your present marriage one that reflects His compassion and faithfulness.

As we pointed out previously, Mark includes only certain miracles, parables and teachings in order to highlight Jesus as Servant and Savior. As the shortest gospel, not everything Jesus said or did is recorded by Mark. One example occurs between the close of chapter nine and the opening of chapter 10 as he doesn't mention a five-month period of time that is recorded in John 7-11 and Luke 9-18. Mark is quick to take us to the cross.

Let's pick up our passage in Mark 10:1: ***“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.”***

Jesus has now finished His ministry in Galilee and is making his final trip to Jerusalem. As they head south they enter Judea and then cross the Jordan River into the land known as Perea. This is the traditional route from Galilee to Jerusalem, which involved a detour around Samaria. Crowds crush around Him and once again Jesus teaches them. There's always more to learn from the Lord, isn't there?

As has happened before the phony Pharisees set Jesus up with a question in order to trip Him up. They're not searching for answers or longing to learn but rather are out to entrap Him. Look at verse 2: ***“And Pharisees came up and in order to test Him asked, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?’”*** The word “*test*” has the idea of “*testing in a malicious*” sense and the tense indicates that they “*kept on asking*” in the hopes that He would incriminate himself.

Some background is helpful at this point. Divorce was very common in that culture but there was a lot of controversy surrounding it. There were two main schools of thought championed by two different rabbis. Incidentally, the option of divorce was available only for the husband:

- **Rabbi Shammai.** Divorce was permitted only in the event of immorality.
- **Rabbi Hillel.** Divorce was allowed for almost any reason. A man could divorce his wife if she was seen talking to other men, if she put too much salt on their food or if she said something unkind about her mother-in-law.

As you can imagine the school of Hillel was much more popular and the Pharisees followed this view as seen in their question recorded in Matthew 19:3: ***“Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?”***

Some historians have noted that it was not uncommon for Roman men to have as many as twenty wives in their lifetime. Divorce was not that prevalent among the Jews but was still an issue. The Pharisees were hoping Jesus would take a side, thus dividing the people and giving the religious leaders ammo to attack Him.

There’s one other cultural connection that is helpful to know. Jesus is now in the territory controlled by Herod Antipas. Herod had committed adultery, divorced his wife and married Herodias, who had divorced her husband. John the Baptist confronted Herod about his adultery and lost his head over it, literally. Mark 6:18: ***“For John had been saying to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’”*** Perhaps the Pharisees are trying to force Jesus into saying something that they can report to Herod so he will arrest and murder Jesus as well.

One pastor puts it like this: *“If Jesus sided with the liberal school, suddenly the Pharisees would become conservatives and say Jesus was going against the law of Moses. If He sided with the conservatives, they would say He was going against public opinion.”* The trap was set - if he condemned divorce, He could suffer the fate of John. If he condoned divorce, He would lose the confidence of the devout people.

I love how Jesus turns the tables on them by ignoring their question. Instead, He answers their question with a question of His own in verse 3: ***“He answered them, ‘What did Moses command you?’”*** Moses was their go-to-man so Jesus took them to what Moses wrote. Let me make three quick observations:

- He takes them back to the Bible. It ultimately doesn’t matter what two rabbis say; we must always ask, *“What does the Bible say?”*
- He uses the word **“command”** to show this question cannot be settled by society or by whatever happens to be politically correct at the time.
- He personalizes it by using the word **“you.”** The Bible must always be applied personally. I love how Jesus moves people from the theoretical to the practical and personal. The question is not, *“What’s your view?”* but, *“What about you?”*

In verse 4, the Pharisees summarize their interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4: ***“Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.”*** It’s interesting that in response to the word **“command,”** they use the word **“allow”** because they’re looking for a loophole.

Jesus calls them out on their sloppy Bible study methods by pointing out that this passage doesn’t condone divorce but actually controls divorce: ***“When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house...”***

Because divorce had become so rampant, Moses gives some regulations to make sure a wife who is divorced by her husband is not left destitute. In order to protect these women, Moses told them that a wife must be given a divorce certificate so that she would not be thrown out on the street with no hope of remarrying. The permission for remarriage must be seen in the context of a divorce that had already taken place.

Look at Mark 10:5: ***“And Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.’”*** The word **“hardness”** is the Greek word, *sklerokardia*, or **“stiffening of the heart”** and is translated as, **“perverseness, obstinacy and stubbornness.”**

I love what Jesus does next as He turns the conversation from a discussion about divorce to the divine design of marriage. He reframes the question from, **“When is it OK to divorce?”** to, **“What does God say about marriage?”**

The religious leaders are all up on what the current culture says about divorce and when they consult the Bible they look for something that lines up with what they already believe. Jesus takes them, and us, all the way back to the first two chapters of the book of Genesis in verse 6: ***“But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’”*** By the way, this verse from Genesis 1:27 speaks right into our society’s confusion about gender. It is a foundational truth that God made humans as **“male and female.”**

I heard about a couple that were extremely eager to get their marriage license but when they got to the courthouse, there was a sign on the door that read: ***“Out to lunch. Back at 1:00 pm. Think it over.”***

Jesus gives us four things to think over regarding marriage in verses 7-9.

1. Leaving. In verse 7, Jesus quotes from Genesis 2:24 when He declares: ***“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother...”*** Once again we see clearly from God’s original design that marriage is between one man and one woman for life. We must always choose Scripture over society – the Bible does not allow same-sex marriage.

The Hebrew word for ***“leave”*** is very strong and means, *“to cut off, abandon, forsake and leave behind.”* When you get married, you need to leave your parents. What this means is that you need to sever the emotional umbilical cord because your loyalty now belongs to your spouse. Your partner should never have to compete with your parents. Leaving your parents does not mean ignoring them or not spending any time with them. It means that your marriage created a new family and that this new family must be a higher priority than your previous family.

2. Cleaving. Jesus then says, ***“...and hold fast to his wife.”*** Once you leave, you then need to be committed to permanence. To ***“hold fast”*** literally means to be permanently glued together -- *“to melt two separate entities together to form a permanent bond.”* It has the idea of joining two things so tightly that they cannot be separated without damaging both things. The idea is similar to being *“welded”* or *“cemented”* together. It is a unique joining of two people into one entity. Notice again that this is a divine transaction: God has glued the two together so that they become one. This is why divorce is so devastating.

It’s pretty easy to get married. It’s the living together afterward that causes all the problems. Over their 35 years of marriage, a wife had given her husband a grapefruit for breakfast every day of their married life. One day, she ran out of grapefruit and apologized profusely to her partner. The husband smiled and replied, *“That’s okay dear. I never liked grapefruit anyway.”* He wasn’t going to let anything sour their relationship.

3. Weaving. Jesus states the goal of marriage in verse 8: ***“And the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh.”*** Once leaving and cleaving take place, then you can experience weaving as you become one flesh. This phrase conveys the idea of oneness. This unity is to be experienced emotionally, spiritually, and physically. In God’s marital math, 1+1=1. God’s

objective for marriage is a loving relationship of oneness. The idea of oneness affirms the indissolubility of marriage.

To “*become one flesh*” is a lifetime process, and according to Ephesians 5:32, is a great mystery. Marriage is not a contract; it’s a covenant. In a contract, the two parties remain separate, kind of like oil and water. They’re shaken up but not mixed together. Left alone they will eventually separate into their original respective parts.

In a covenant, the two become one and the same, more like mashed potatoes. You take two potatoes, one sweet (in our marriage that would be Beth) and the other regular, skin them alive, cut them up, put them in hot water to soften them and then you mash them into one.

Several years ago I visited with a couple that had been married for over 50 years. Laverne had a stroke so Robert cared for her, made all the meals, and kept the house clean. When I asked him what he thought the secret of marriage was, he responded immediately with just one word: “*Christ!*” Jesus had mashed their lives together in amazing ways. My mind went to Ecclesiastes 4:9-12: “***Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.***”

Then Robert got a grin on his face and said that when couples make their marriage vows, it’s best to forget the “better” stuff in the “better or worse” part because it will never be better than on your wedding day! Apparently, right after the ceremony, Robert told Laverne that this was the best he was ever going to be! Actually, I think he got better over time!

Leaving, cleaving and weaving describe what marriages are to look like. When the marital vow is broken, grieving is sure to follow.

4. Grieving. The sanctity of marriage is grounded in God himself. To break what He has brought together is grievous to Him and hurts us as well. Listen to God’s heart in Malachi 2:16: “***For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.***” The

NASB renders it this way: **“‘For I hate divorce,’ says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘and him who covers his garment with wrong,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.’”**

God’s objective for marriage is a loving relationship of oneness. Jesus said it this way in Mark 10:9: **“What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”** I like how the KJV renders this verse: **“What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”** The word for **“joined”** means to be **“yoked”** together. I like this. Marriage is meant to be a yoke, not a joke! A yoke was used to maximize the work capacity of two animals.

Marriage is often described as **“getting hitched.”** Think of two animals yoked together and hitched to a heavy wagon. Did you know that one Belgian draft horse is able to pull 8,000 pounds? However, if two horses are trained to work together in a harness they can pull 32,000 pounds! Two together can accomplish four times as much when they work as one! That’s the power of synergy. A good relationship has a good reward for its toil because when couples pull together, great things can happen.

If you’re married, be vigilant to guard your vows and determine to keep them, even when your feelings fade...and they will.

Your marriage matters to the Majesty and therefore it must matter to you. See your spouse as your companion, as one who completes you, and as one you are to live in communion with. And make sure that you have done the *leaving* part, that you are *cleaving* to each other, and that you are allowing the Holy Spirit to do His work of *weaving* your lives into one so that you don’t cause *grieving*.

After hearing this, the disciples want to go deeper as seen in verse 10: **“And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter.”** Jesus, as He often does, declares the heart of God with boldness. Remember that what He says is strong because He has strong views about marriage.

Listen to verses 11-12: **“And He said to them, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.’”** The use of adultery here directs the disciples back to the command of God in Exodus 20:14: **“You shall not commit adultery.”** Notice that Jesus elevates the status of the wife, giving her equal rights and responsibilities.

Before we move on, here are eight takeaways:

1. **God does hate divorce because of the unresolved problems it reveals and the pain of the wounds it causes.** We can't water this down or try to act like He doesn't.
2. **God does not hate divorced people.** Many of you are divorced and are suffering through some incredible pain right now. Whatever the circumstances of your divorce were, God does not hate you. He loves you.
3. **Divorce is not the only thing God hates.** Sometimes we single out divorce and forget what God said in Proverbs 6:16-19: ***“There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.”***
4. **God does not forbid all divorce.** There are two conspicuous exceptions to the “no divorce” dictate of Scripture. 1 Corinthians 7:15 teaches that if the unbelieving spouse wants to break it off, the believer can let him or her go. I know some of you are in tremendous pain as you long for your spouse to get saved. And, in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9, Jesus recognized that in the case of unrepentant adultery, the one who was wronged is not obligated to stay married. Having said that, God's heart is *always* for reconciliation and restoration of the marriage covenant. The death of a spouse also releases one from marriage. Let me be quick to add that if you're in a marriage where you're being abused or in danger, you need to separate yourself from your spouse for your own safety.
5. **If you're planning to get married, get premarital counseling and make a purity pledge.** Actually, if you want to get married at Edgewood, we insist on these two requirements.
6. **Hold on to hope if your marriage is in a mess.** Jesus Christ loves to put hurting hearts back together. Don't look for a way out; look for a way through. If you don't work at oneness, you'll drift towards isolation.
7. **Deal with any unfinished business.** Perhaps you need to ask for forgiveness from God, or ask for, or extend forgiveness to your former spouse or seek reconciliation with your children. Or if you're a child of divorce, maybe it's time to make peace with your parents.
8. **The church has not always been a healing community.** I recognize that the church in general has not always been an oasis of compassion or understanding. In some instances, the church has been overly harsh on

individuals who have been stung by divorce. From my perspective, Edgewood is an exception as we offer grace and support to those who are hurting through ministries like Divorce Care on Wednesday nights.

It's no accident that the very next passage deals with children. One pastor entitled his sermon that incorporated both texts this way: "*The Sanctity of Marriage and the Security of Children.*" Malachi 2:15 links the importance of marital unity and the raising of godly children: "***Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.***"

Because we've focused on children the last couple weeks, I'm just going to hit the highlights of Mark 10:13-16 by focusing on four attitudes and actions.

1. Bring your children to Jesus. Look at verse 13: "***And they were bringing children to Him that He might touch them...***" The idea here is that parents were continuously bringing their kids to Jesus, wanting Jesus to connect with them in a very personal way. We know from Luke 18:15 that this included infants. Parents and grandparents, do all you can to bring your children and grandchildren to Jesus. Pray for them every day. Read the Bible to them. Bring them to church and to AWANA and to Super Saturdays. And the best way for you to bring them to Jesus is to make sure you're growing yourself by plugging into a Growth Group and that you're gathering with God's people. If you're a mom, consider joining Entrusted with a Child's Heart next fall. If you're a dad or grandpa, join us at the Iron Sharpens Iron conference on April 1st.

2. Beware of attitudes that hinder children. Let's pick up the last part of verse 13 and verse 14: "***...and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, He was indignant and said to them, 'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.'***" This is remarkable since the disciples had already been told to receive children in His name. The word for "***rebuke***" is quite strong. It refers to "***sharply punishing.***"

The disciples didn't want Jesus to be bothered by kids but Jesus was more bothered by the disciples! In fact, He was "***indignant***" with them, which means "***sorely vexed with great anger.***"

D.L. Moody once returned from a preaching opportunity and reported two and a half conversions. His host asked, *“Two adults and a child, I suppose?”* Moody replied, *“No, two children and an adult. The children gave their whole lives. The adult had only half of his left to give.”*

3. Become like children to receive the kingdom of God. Once again, Jesus uses children to teach us adults about spiritual truth in verse 15: *“Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”* Children have a lot to teach us about faith, don’t they? They are dependent, curious and trusting. We must be the same.

4. Bless children warmly. Jesus was asked by parents to touch their children but He does a lot more than that in verse 16: *“And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands on them.”* Jesus picked them up and verbally blessed them, using touch and words. The word for *“blessed”* is a compound phrase used only here and means that He *“fervently blessed repeatedly.”* Jesus is warm and affectionate toward children. We must be the same.

We believe children are a gift from God (Psalm 127:3). As a church family, we are committed to partner with parents in the evangelizing and discipling of sons and daughters to be difference-makers for Christ. One of the ways we demonstrate this commitment is by giving parents an opportunity to publically dedicate their child to Christ. We have brochures available that explain more or you can jump on the website.

We all wear different hats, don’t we? As we wrap up today, I recognize that this sermon has probably stirred up all sorts of things within you. Perhaps you’re wearing the hat of guilt and shame. Or maybe your hat is called remorse and regret.

You need to know that God’s grace is enough! God’s grace is greater than your guilt. His mercy covers whatever has happened in your marriage. Through Jesus Christ there is forgiveness for all our failures.

God’s grace is enough because we are covered in His love.

Closing Prayer

Closing Song: Your Grace is Enough

Benediction

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” (Romans 15:13)