

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

³ “What did Moses command you?” he replied.

⁴ They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”

⁵ “It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied. ⁶ “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ ⁷ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

¹⁰ When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. ¹¹ He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. ¹² And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”

¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them. (NIV 84)

Theme: What is a God-Pleasing Marriage?

1. It’s a lasting Marriage
2. It’s a Christ-centered Marriage.

Who do you know that has a perfect marriage? Maybe it’s you. Or not. The truth is, there is no such thing as the perfect marriage. A sinful human being is joining together with another sinful human being. They come from different backgrounds and have different viewpoints. There will be arguments and disagreements; problems with finances or health issues. There is no such thing as the perfect marriage because the two people getting married aren’t perfect. But that doesn’t mean you can’t have a God-pleasing marriage. A

marriage that is a God pleasing one is one in which Christ is the center and it is one that lasts until death.

When God created the world he did so in six days. And on the sixth day he created a man, Adam. He then paraded all the animals in front of Adam so that he could realize there was no one else like him—there was no helper suitable for him. Then he caused Adam to go into a deep sleep and he opened him up, took a rib, and he made a woman, Eve, out of that rib. She was perfectly suitable helper for Adam—compatible companions. God made a male and female and joined them together as one, making them husband and wife. At the beginning of creation, before the fall into sin God joined man and woman together as he instituted marriage.

Marriage is God’s institution. It’s not something that man came up with on their own. It’s not something that humans and those humans running the government have a right to change. Marriage is God’s. And what is marriage to God? We saw his definition in all three lessons today: **a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, so they are not longer two, but one.** Marriage is when a man and a woman—who were two, join together as one. The catechism definition is also good one to remember: marriage is a life-long union between one man and one woman. A life-long union. After Jesus defined marriage he concludes, **what God has joined together, let man not separate.**

But what do you see? Divorce after divorce. The statistic you often hear is that 50% of marriages end in divorce. While that number isn’t exactly accurate there is no doubt that many marriages do end in divorce. Just think of all the people you know who have gotten a divorce—maybe you have yourself. The amount is staggering and disappointing. And make no mistake about it—no divorce is pleasing in the eyes of the Lord. **I hate divorce** God says in Malachi. While God does allow the non-sinners party to get an official divorce in two certain situations he only does so after the one-flesh marriage covenant has been broken already by the other party. So the only divorces God recognizes is when someone has broken the marriage already, then the non-sinners party is free to get an official divorce. That is why God says, **I hate divorce**, because divorce always involves sin.

No couple gets married while thinking that they are going to get divorced one day. But yet it happens over and over again. Why? One of the main reasons is because people fail to see what marriage truly is. When a couple gets married both the husband and wife are agreeing to live together as one until death. That is the basis of marriage—that commitment before God; divorce isn't even an option. But for many people, that is not the basis of marriage. It's all about joy, or happiness, love, or attraction. While those are important parts of marriage, and love is the pinnacle of marriage—they don't make a marriage. Love has ebbs and flows. Looks change. Because marriage involves two sinners living together in the sinful world it won't always be filled with pure joy or happiness. And some figure if their marriage isn't filled with love or joy or happiness than they are free to get a divorce—but God doesn't recognize such divorces.

Perhaps you are thinking to yourself, “this sermon doesn't really apply to me since I've never had a divorce.” Or maybe you've never been married. But it still applies to you. None of the relationships you have with others—whether with your spouse, family members, or friends is perfect. Why? Because it is marred by selfishness. We are often self-centered in our dealings with others. We often talk about you and me or you and I. You don't listen to me, You spent all my money, you didn't take out the trash as I asked you to, you forgot to pick up the kids, you didn't get me anything, you never tell me that you love me anymore, I don't like when you do that, I just wish you would change... We could go on and on. We are self-centered. We focus on the you and me but we forget about the we and us. We fail to realize that we are no longer two but one. We focus on ourselves so much that we lose that one-flesh relationship.

And so it is clear as we look at our lives that we often fail to keep God's will when it comes to his institution of marriage—in all our dealings with others. We have much to repent of, knowing full well that we deserve nothing but his wrath and punishment for sins. And we have much to strive toward in our interaction with others—especially our spouses.

There is no such thing as a perfect marriage—but that doesn't mean we can't have a God-pleasing marriage. And we do that by following the example set for us by Christ.

It is Christ who gave up everything for us. We gave up the glories of heaven to be born of a virgin and live here on this sin-filled earth as one of us. But he also gave up his life on the cross for us, so that he could pay for the guilt of all our sins and suffer through their eternal punishment. And by taking away our sins and crediting us with his perfect life, he made us holy. Through the waters of baptism we are connected to Christ and are his own dear children. And so in the eyes of God we are no longer sinners as Paul explains in our second lesson, **Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.**

And Christ did this for us. For us, who constantly sin against him and fail to obey his commands. For us who are more concerned about ourselves and our own happiness than what God says about our relationships with others. Even when we are not faithful Christ was faithful to us and gave up his life for us. It is like the prophet Hosea. The Lord made Hosea marry a prostitute who would cheat on him and leave him. He later told Hosea to take her back. This served as a picture of faithless Israel going after other gods and the faithful Lord who still did not reject his people. We are like faithless Israel who go after our own gods of our selfish thoughts and desires but God remains faithful—even sending his son to save us!

As you live together as one flesh, follow the example of Christ. Husbands—love your wives just as Christ love the church and gave himself up for her. Love not with a feeling or emotion; but with words and actions. Treat her as you want to be treated. Not taking advantage of her or mistreating her in anyway. Consider her wants and desires before your own wants and desires. As you love and take care of your body so love and take care of your wife. As Christ loved us—even to the point of giving up his life for us, so love your wives.

And because Christ loved the Church and gave his life up for us, we have no problem following Christ and obeying him. And so in the same way, wives, obey and honor your husbands. As the church submits to Christ and follows him, so you submit to your husbands as the leaders of the family. Not that you are any less important in the eyes of the Lord, any less gifted—but because these are the roles are Savior or decided for us.

And both husbands and wives—keep Christ the center of your marriage. Keep Christ and his cross the focus of your marriage. When your spouse sins against you, forgive him freely as Christ forgives you. Instead of holding grudges against each other, or brining past sins in order to manipulate each other in order to get what you want, forgive. Instead of complaining to each other, or talking bad about your spouse did—forgive and speak highly of each other. Remember that you are no longer separate—for two have become one; and so you do what is the best interest of you—one flesh, not what is in the best interest of you separately.

But again, some of you may be thinking, “that works well when someone shares your same faith, but what about someone in my situation—my spouse doesn’t share my faith at all!” That is the case with many people—to differing extents. Some spouses don’t care and other spouses try to prohibit the practice of one’s faith. Either way, what can you do when you want to keep Christ front and center in your marriage, but your spouse isn’t interested? The Lord commands that you still keep him front and center. He still commands that you live according to his Word. And husbands, you still love your wives; and wives, you still submit to your husbands—as you would to the Lord. And in doing so—in obeying the Lord and listening to him you hope to win your spouse over, that they may see your good deeds and praise and thank the Lord—hearing the gospel and come to faith! So regardless of your spouse it is important to keep Christ the center of your life.

And you do the same for your family. Jesus says in the last part of our text, **Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.** Husbands in the lead, and wives helping them, are to bring up their children in the care and instruction of the Lord. So together as one flesh, bring your children to Jesus. Of course there are many ways to do this—first and foremost is to bring them on a regular basis to worship and Sunday school. There are things like VBS, Kids at Christmas and Easter, making sure they are baptize, and so on.

But bringing your children to Jesus involves much more. It really involves how you live your life. What is important to you will be important to your children. Is Christ front and center in your life, or does he get shelved for the week and only pulled out on Sundays? Does the way you and your spouse interact follow the example of

Christ and his Church, or one of selfishness that doesn’t look at all like a one-flesh relationship? Make Christ a top priority in your life and your family’s life. Talk about Christ and his Word at home. Make it a habit of reading a devotion together as a family. And live your life in love for each other as Christ loves you.

There is no such thing as a God-pleasing marriage. And with two sinful human being living together and having sinful children, there never will be. But a Christ-centered marriage and family is one that is pleasing to the Lord. Because of Christ your sins have been washed away. Live a life of love for each other just as Christ loves you. Amen.