

Focus on Mark 10:2–16

WHAT is important to know?

—From *“Exegetical Perspective,”* C. Clifton Black

Jesus’ strict teaching about marriage in Mark 10:2–12 should be located in its social background. Mark would hardly have warned his church of divorce’s consequences if Christians were not already practicing it. Moreover, both Jesus and Mark addressed a culture that provided for the divorced woman no safety net: neither alimony nor any means for legal recourse. What may sound to our ears as relentlessly harsh assumes a different tenor when we understand that Jesus’ intent is the protection and honor of the spouse as a child created in God’s image, not as chattel to be discarded on selfish whim. The latter would be utterly incongruent with discipleship that cares for the vulnerable.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From *“Theological Perspective,”* James J. Thompson

Divorce remains a live issue, but most Protestant churches have concluded that respect for marriage and the institution of marriage means that some particular marriages should end. Divorce is tragic, but not the worst evil. If we learn anything from this text, it is that we must be cautious about attempting to justify ourselves. Jesus claims the authority to supersede even the law of Moses, but we are not Jesus. How might he reframe the question, turn it to its roots, and demand full purity of heart? How would he tell us to respond with gratitude towards God’s grace?

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives? —From *“Pastoral Perspective,”* David B. Howell

Divorce is something that you can do, but it is not what God intended. Jesus is less concerned about what is allowed and more concerned about what is intended in the kingdom of God. The way that Jesus reframes the question of divorce in terms of his message about the coming kingdom is the first key to answering our questions. Jesus was declaring the beginning of a new era in which relationships could work if each party approached the other with mutual respect and concern. It was now possible to go beyond what was just permissible to what was kingdom enhanced.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From *“Homiletical Perspective,”* Charles L. Campbell

The great temptation of this text is to turn Jesus’ teaching into a new “law” about divorce and remarriage. But Jesus’ words are not meant to be a rigid, legal principle. Such a move, in fact, runs directly counter to Jesus’ underlying theological emphases. Jesus actually seeks to move beyond a legalistic approach to questions of divorce (the approach of his adversaries) toward a theological affirmation about God’s purposes for marriage in the context of God’s inbreaking reign. The context is Jesus’ respect for the deep bond of marriage—and possibly his sensitivity to the great pain caused by divorce—not his attempt to establish a new law.