

# "HEAR YE HIM"

## A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: WHAT GOD HATH JOINED

Scripture: Matthew 19:3-9

The Pharisees came also unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he who made man at the beginning, made him male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He said unto them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and whoso marrieth her that is put away, doth commit adultery.

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For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

Like many other sayings of Jesus, his teaching about marriage and divorce was prompted by a question propounded by the Pharisees. It was a hot question, an insincere question, designed to trap or convict or confuse. The question of divorce was one endlessly discussed by the rabbis, who were divided into two schools of thought. One held that a man could divorce his wife if he saw a prettier woman he liked, or if his wife over-seasoned or burned his food. The other school held that only adultery or fornication was cause for divorce. As further background for this question it should be remembered that the Essenes taught all marriage was wrong, and that not long before, John the Baptist had been beheaded because he dared to speak out about Herod's divorce and remarriage to his brother's wife. With this in mind you can see just how hot a question it was. Any possible answer was going to offend somebody.

Notice too the form of the question, "Is it lawful?" The Pharisees were hoping that Jesus would say it was not lawful, thus making himself liable to charges before the Sanhedrin; for divorce was lawful under the law of Moses, which allowed the husband to divorce the wife, but not the wife the husband. The rabbis regarded divorce as a special privilege granted to a chosen race. Jesus does not deny the technical legality of divorce under the law of Moses, but says that the law was given permissively "because of the hardness of your hearts,"

that is, in order to preserve some of the rights and human dignity of womanhood who without such a law might have been cast off at the husband's whim, and with no clear definition of her future status.

Jesus did not discuss the question "Is it lawful!" He went beyond the law of Moses to a discussion of God's original intention and purpose in the institution of marriage -- to moral and spiritual principles. He quoted the words of God at the time of creation, that a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined unto his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh; that what God has thus joined, man should not put asunder. Marriage should be permanent and sacred, or it is not true marriage at all. Man and wife are two parts of one unity, of one entity, of one personality. Mutually they surrender something of their own personality, their own will, to each other. Each one complements and supplements the other -- physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. But in this surrender, each gains more than he loses, for each finds his highest self-completion and self-fulfillment in the other. Each comes to feel that he is needed by the other, that he is important to somebody-- and this is one of the basic needs of the human personality.

Even the secular law recognizes the peculiar unity of matrimony. Husband and wife are responsible for each other's debts and financial contracts. Unless

otherwise expressly stipulated or agreed to, property of husband and wife is held in common, or jointly. One cannot testify against the other in a criminal action, for this would be a violation of the constitutional guarantee that no man can be required to testify against himself; and a man's wife is his other self. In true marriage this unity grows year by year, as each party to the marriage contributes more and more to the pooling and sharing of time, possessions, strengths, talents, responsibilities, privileges, joys and sorrows.

It takes two to make a home in the fullest sense. God intended marriage to be a sacrament with deepest religious significance, as well as legal, economic, social, and moral significance. God intended marriage to be permanent and indissoluble. Such permanence is essential for the economic, social, emotional, and spiritual stability of the children who come to that home, who will suffer if that home is divided. No one has yet invented a system for rearing children which can equal the Christian home, where one husband and one wife, with a deep sense of responsibility to God and to each other, love each other and love their children, devoting every effort and every energy to the maintenance of the home.

There is no denying, however, that weak, immature, perverse, careless, or rebellious human nature often does dissolve the ties which God intended should be permanent. Whether you believe that Jesus ever sanctioned divorce or not, it is an indisputable fact that adultery automatically breaks the covenant of marriage and dissolves the unity of two by bringing in a third party. When this occurs, what then? And here it should be stated also that adultery (at least in the spiritual sense) may mean a lot of other things beside an overt physical act with a third party. The marriage vows obligate husband and wife to live wholly for each other, as well as from all others. If any husband or wife gives more time, more love, more devotion, more attention, more money, more strength or more loyalty to something or someone else than he does to his spouse, his home, and his family, he is neglecting and violating his marriage vows in a way that can easily become tantamount to the disloyalty of adultery, regardless of whether or not he is caught in an overt physical act.

Did Jesus sanction divorce for any cause? Mark and Luke make no exception to the rule, "Whoso shall put away his wife and marry another, committeth adultery." Mark is generally regarded by Bible scholars as being the earliest and most authentic text. But other scholars point out that neither Mark nor Luke were members of Jesus' company. They were not eyewitnesses to the things he said and did. Matthew was; and Matthew in two separate incidents interpolates the exception to the rule, "Except for fornication." As we have said before, the question was "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause." Jesus never answered that question directly. He went beyond legality to enunciate higher principles of human conduct than were laid down in the law of Moses.

Jesus' answer to the question about divorce was a re-affirmation of human rights, particularly women's rights. He laid down the principle that marriage is a sacred unity not meant to be broken. But when the spiritual unity of a marriage has been irreparably destroyed, or made impossible by continued and confirmed neglect, disloyalty, cruelty, brutality, failure to assume a proper share of the burden and responsibility of the home, or any other thing that threatens life, health, sanity, and well being of spouse and children, or the stability of the family, then it is neither fair nor representative of the Jesus who was the champion of human rights to paint him as the strict legalist who refuses to sanction separation for any cause whatsoever.

Divorce is only the legal recognition of what has already taken place -- separation and dissolution of the spiritual bonds of marriage. Like marriage, divorce should never be entered into lightly or inadvisedly. Divorce for trivial causes ignores the spiritual and sacramental basis of marriage, and the inalienable human rights of the other party. One who feels that a divorce is imminent should make every possible effort at reconciliation, should cling to every hope for repentance and reform, knowing that divorce, and particularly remarriage after divorce, closes the door on reconciliation, and that Jesus' teaching, regardless of possible exceptions to the rule is, "What God hath joined, let not man put asunder."