

## Study in Mark 10: Looking for Loopholes

*“You can’t have your cake and eat it too,”* is a popular English everyday proverb or figure of speech. What it literally means is *“you cannot simultaneously retain your cake and eat it.”*

Once the cake is eaten, it is gone. One cannot have two incompatible things, nor should one try to have more than is reasonable.

The proverb’s meaning is similar to the phrases *“you can’t have it both ways”* and *“you can’t have the best of both worlds.”*

As a result, this poem was written by **Joseph Charles Salak** and was printed in the Chicago Daily Tribune on **April 26, 1949**:

*“I first met a girl named Kate - And then Edith with eyes of blue,  
But I couldn’t, I discovered, - Have my Kate and Edith, too.*

## Study in Mark 10: Looking for Loopholes

*A Pharisees Guide to How to Have your Kate and Edith too!*

**Mark 10:1-2 NKJV**, *“Then He arose from there and came to the region of Judea by the other side of the Jordan. And multitudes gathered to Him again, and as He was accustomed, He taught them again. **The Pharisees** came and asked Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” testing Him.”*

The Pharisees formed the largest and most influential religious-political party in New Testament times.

The name "**Pharisee**" means **“separated one.”** The Pharisees separated themselves from society to study and teach the law, but they also separated themselves from the common people because they considered themselves to religiously clean and would not rub shoulders with less, unclean, people.

The Pharisees were extremely detail-oriented in matters pertaining to the law of Moses. They taught that the way to God was by obeying the law.

Because of that, they had to develop a system of loop holes around the law to do what they wanted without breaking the letter of the Law. And then, to divert any attention from themselves, they practiced a lot of finger-pointing.

Jesus scolded them for their self-righteousness and hypocrisy.

Look at this scathing rebuke He made of the Pharisees in... **Matthew 23:13 NIV**, *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.”*

**Matthew 23:13, 27-28 NIV**, *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but, on the inside, you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”*

Remember, the question in **Mark 10:1-2**, is coming from these people...

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Matthew adds a little more information to the question at hand. He says they asked the question with this twist...

**Matthew 19:3 NKJV**, *“The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, **“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?”**”*

You see, the prevailing practice at the time was, in order to avoid committing adultery and breaking the Law, one could have their Kate and Edit too, by **legally terminating** one relationship to enter into another.

After all, I have fallen out of love with Kate and now I love Edith.

Jesus sees where this little trap is going. These guys know that what they are asking is very controversial. **God said one thing**, but **Moses in his Law** made provisions for **a different answer**. An answer God’s way would possibly cause Jesus to speak against Mosaic Law and vice versa.

**Mark 10:3-4 NKJV**, *“And He answered and said to them, **“What did Moses command you?”** They said, **“Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to dismiss her.”**”*

So legally, yes, divorce did make a way for you to separate from your wife. **But why did Moses do this? Jesus explains...**

**Mark 10:5 NKJV**, *“And Jesus answered and said to them, “Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.”*

A "**hardened heart**" is an attitude that is *stubbornly self-centered*. The Old Testament uses the term "**stiff-necked**," describing someone who refuses to look around. Hardheartedness is always directed **at God and His will**.

Though the sin here is directly linked to men who treat their wives unfairly by not valuing God's Word and plan for humanity, Jesus will end by showing us that the precept applies to both husbands and wives.

Many of the laws in the Old Testament are designed to lessen the hardship that our sin causes others.

Men in the Old Testament era had cultural authority which, if they chose to abuse it, could devastate women.

**Malachi 2:16 NASB** is translated *“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.”*

An extremely **literal translation**: *“I hate [when men] send away [their wives].”*

That is why the **NIV translators** went this way...**Malachi 2:16**, *“The man who hates and divorces his wife,” says the Lord, the God of Israel, “does violence to the one he should protect,” says the Lord Almighty.” So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.”*

But Jewish Pharisees twisted the meaning and translated it, *“if you hate her, divorce her,”* and then they used Moses' legal process as a loop hole.

But Jesus in explaining the reasons behind Moses' divorce process, goes a step further. He says...

**Mark 10:6-9 NKJV**, *“But from the beginning of the creation, God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become **one flesh**’; so then they are **no longer two**, but **one flesh**. Therefore what **God has joined** together, let **not man separate**.”*

Marriage is meant to be a lifelong union where two are made one **by God**.

So, if you Pharisees think you can just marry one girl and when you are done loving her, divorce her and remarry another to avoid breaking the “thou shalt not commit adultery law” **it doesn’t fly! And murder isn’t an option either.**

Someone heard that I was speaking about marriage and divorce this week and sent me a joke that I thought was rather funny....

***“Marriage is like a deck of cards. In the beginning all you need is a couple of hearts and a diamond. By the end, you wish you had a club and a spade!”***

Now, it wasn’t just the Pharisees who were practicing this kind of “musical chairs” marriage game. The disciples had accepted this norm too. So when they get Jesus alone, they reopen the discussion.

**Mark 10:10-12 NKJV**, *“In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same matter. So He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”*

What Jesus is saying is... **Divorce doesn’t nullify the sin of adultery!**

**Ouch!** Matthew adds what their reaction was to His teaching...

**Matthew 19:10 NKJV**, *“His disciples said to Him, “If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”*

Now, whether they were suggesting that it was better to stay celibate or since it is adultery in either case, why not just do away with all the legal stuff and just live together. That is where a lot of people go even today.

Now, I have probably made the majority of us very uncomfortable today. Sorry! **Let me talk a bit about the grace side of all** of this that’s often missed by students of the Bible.

As Jesus indicates here, the basis of Moses’ allowance for divorce, – **was because of the hardness of their hearts!** There is no loop hole that will hide the issue in God’s sight. Unrestrained lust that breaks God’s law!

The certificate of divorce isn’t sinful. It is lust that is sinful. The Law doesn’t say, **“Thou shall not divorce.”** It says, **“Thou shall not commit adultery,”** and **“Thou shall not covet (lust) someone else’s wife or people or stuff.”**

Moses allowed divorce only because of the state of their hearts.

The church at large has for years taught, that because God hates divorce, that divorce is a sin. **I disagree strongly.**

Jesus doesn't throw Moses under the bus for allowing divorce. Instead, He suggests that...

Divorce is not the problem or the sin, **it's what causes divorce** that is a sin.

### **If divorce is a sin, then...**

#### **1. There would be no exceptions.**

In Matthew's account of this conversation, he adds another bit of information to Jesus' declaration...

**Matthew 19:9 NKJV**, *"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, **except for sexual immorality**, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."*

Any sexual activity with people other than the one you are married to. It carries the idea of ongoing sexual activity.

And Jesus is saying that it provides an exception to what? To divorce? Yes, but more specifically to the adultery that occurs when one divorces and remarries. So actually, this is an exception given for both divorce and remarriage.

Why people don't get this is beyond me. It is clearly stated here by Jesus.

***If divorce or remarriage was a sin,  
Jesus wouldn't have made this exception.***

***Second, if divorce was a sin, then...***

#### **2. God would not have divorced Israel.**

When Israel turned to other gods and worshipped them it was called idolatry.

But God saw His relationship with Israel as more like a marriage covenant. So when they did this to Him unwilling to stop, He did the following...

**Jeremiah 3:6-8 NIV**, *"During the reign of King Josiah, the Lord said to me, "Have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She has gone up on every*

*high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there. I thought that after she had done all this she would return to me but she did not, and her unfaithful sister Judah saw it. I gave faithless Israel **her certificate of divorce and sent her away** because of all her **adulteries.**”*

Though Jesus was saying ...**Divorce doesn't nullify the sin of adultery!** What He was saying was...Unabated Adultery nullifies the marriage vows and causes the need for Divorce! AND THAT IS WHAT GOD DID.

When God divorced Israel, it wasn't God sinning against His vows. Divorce isn't sin, it's the stuff that causes divorce that is sin. It was Israel's abandoning of her vows because of the hardness of their hearts that was SIN.

To stay in a relationship where adultery is a continuous issue, would be to condone sin – there has to be a line drawn in the sand. For your sake, for the offender's sake, for the kid's sake, and the sake of others.

If you read further, you see that God was also trying to send a message to Judah who was toying with adultery too.

SOMETIMES DIVORCE IS THE ONLY ANSWER, AND IT WOULD BE WRONG NOT TO DIVORCE.

***Thirdly, if divorce was a sin, then...***

### **3. Paul would not have permitted it for other reasons.**

Now before we get to that additional exception. Paul makes it clear, just like Jesus did with the Pharisees, about the original intent for marriage when God instituted marriage. We see that in...

**1 Corinthians 7:10-11 NKJV**, *“Now to the married I command, yet **not I but the Lord**: A wife is not to depart from her husband. 11 But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.”*

Having made the Lord's case clear, which is spoken in Genesis before sin entered the equation, Paul gives another exception to divorce.

**1 Corinthians 7:12-16 NIV**, *“To the rest I say this (**I, not the Lord**): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he **must not divorce her**. 13 And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, **she must not divorce him.** 14 For*

**the unbelieving** husband has been **sanctified** through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been **sanctified** through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, **they are holy. 15 But if the unbeliever** leaves, **let it be so**. The brother or the sister **is not bound** in such circumstances; God has called us to **live in peace**. 16 How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?"

In this scenario, the believer must take the high road and stay in the marriage as long as the unbeliever is willing to live with them – to stay in the marriage.

I think it interesting that the believer's ability to divorce in this scenario is dependent on the other's decision to "live with them."

It **isn't saying** until they **divorce you**, it is saying "*they must not divorce as long as the other party is willing to live with them.*" But if they **leave** (not divorce). If **they walk away** from the marriage, the **believer isn't bound**.

**Bound to what?** To the command – they "**must not divorce,**" given earlier.

Now, because the unbeliever has not submitted to Christ, he or she is not subject to the same kind of command from the Lord (**must not divorce**).

But if they decide they aren't going to continue living with a believer anymore and abandon the marriage, *that is when the believer is able to divorce.*

They are not bound by the command not to divorce. They can live in peace. And living in peace without that other person living with them could mean that they're life is finally at peace or that they are at peace with the Lord.

Or, it could mean that they are at peace and not bound to stay unmarried as Jesus suggested in Matthew 19.

And knowing that Jesus made this provision, I think the latter definition is also in play here in 1 Corinthians 7.

God sees a believer's endurance and faithfulness and by His grace grants us peace. With all that said, I still think God never intended for marriage to be a temporary institution. If you have been through a divorce, you know how much you never want to go through that again.

**Practically, what can we do to avoid divorce?** What do you do when your marriage is in trouble? Separate? Give up and walk away? File for divorce?

Prior to talking about divorce, Paul gave these instructions in...

**1 Corinthians 7:2-5 NIV**, *“Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. **The husband** should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and **likewise** the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. **In the same way**, the husband does not have authority over his own body but **yields** it to his wife. **Do not deprive each** other except perhaps by **mutual consent** and for a time, so that you may **devote yourselves to prayer**. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your **lack of self-control.**” (How far is too far to use your wife or husband’s body?)*

**Galatians 5:22 NIV**, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”*

Marriage happens when 2 people fall in Love and mutually agree to marry. A happy Marriage exists when 2 people commit to love one another, and practice **mutual decision making** that is **bathed in prayer**. If you don’t do these things, your marriage will not survive or if it does, it will be unhappily endured.

With this kind of **mutual consideration** in mind concerning marriage, Paul tells us what that looks like and urges us to remember the one who set the example for us in...

**Ephesians 5:21,28-29 NIV**, *“Husbands, love your wives, **just as Christ loved the church** and gave himself up for her...In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives **as their own bodies**. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they **feed and care** for their body, **just as Christ does the church.**” **He doesn’t force us ever.***

Embracing His love should inform the way we love others; especially our spouses. Jesus gave up Himself for us. So, love Him by loving others as you love yourself. Great commandment in action. **Have you accepted His love? LET’S PRAY**