



# Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

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SERMON – 19<sup>TH</sup> PENTECOST  
GENESIS 2:18-25 AND MARK 10:2-16  
OCTOBER 3, 2021  
“TREATING HARDENED ARTERIES”

When you buy a car, you get a book called an owner's manual, or at least you used to, which tells you how to take care of it. If you follow the manufacturer's advice things will likely go a lot better your car. But in case it doesn't they have a section, usually in the back, called the “*trouble shooting guide*” – what to do if this or that doesn't work. Similarly, when you insure a car, you get a little piece of paper telling you what you are covered for – and on the flip side of that paper is usually printed “*what to do if you are in an accident.*” The provision of a trouble shooting guide or accident reporting instructions by no means suggests that your car's manufacturer or insurer wants something to go wrong – the opposite in fact is probably true – they want you to travel safely and free of worry.

But sometimes things do go wrong – whether it's your fault for not keeping up with the maintenance recommendations for your car or safe driving practices is entirely beside the point – you need to fix something and you need to get on the road again. The Pharisees – important Jewish religious leaders of the time, seemed to have concluded that Moses' provision in the law for divorce meant that Moses – and by extension God, thought divorce was ok. If there is a law that tells you how to do something, and you are a good and righteous person if you followed the law, then the practice must pass religious muster.

This was precisely the opportunity – or shall we say dilemma faced by Joseph when he learned that his betrothed wife Mary (betrothal all but meant marriage at that time) was “with child.” If ever anything satisfied the criteria of the law for “*sending a wife away*” it was infidelity. The Old Testament origin of that law was Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which said “*if a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him, because he finds something out about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house...and if she later marries another man who divorces her...the first husband cannot again marry her.*” Whilst a rather uncommon scenario both then as now, the intent was to say that divorce was not something to enter on a whim. It was to be a permanent break of what was intended to be a permanent union.

The Pharisees saw marriage therefore purely as a legal issue – and in some ways it is. Even in ancient Israel there were cultural and legal rituals and rights that attended it. But God intended marriage, by definition a union of a man and a woman, as the foundation of human community – its dissolution was therefore a thwarting of that creative intent. To our Lord Jesus arguing the issue of divorce from the relative obscurity of a legal code was not where the question belonged. It belonged in Genesis – not Deuteronomy, and so that is where our Lord takes his questioners – many of them probably kicking and screaming.

In Genesis we read of God's good intent – how things were designed to be. In Deuteronomy, we read about what to do if things go wrong, if you will, if the marriage breaks down or crashes. And in Mark we encounter the same – our Lord plucking – rescuing might be a better term, marriage from the realm of law codes and it's definition of things – what after all constitutes “displeasing” in a marriage – good luck with that, and back into the realm of grace – God's provision for people he loves. Not that the law doesn't have it's good purposes – at it's best it shelters us from sin by placing guardrails around our sinful human natures – but when we humans jump those guardrails – and we always will – the law can do little more than find us a fair settlement. You see, when we live by the law, as the Pharisees were awfully eager to do, we ask the question this way – ‘*what must we do to satisfy*’ ...which often as not means “*what can we get by with.*”

Jesus does not want us to live that way – bobbing and weaving through a definitional/propositional faith. Jesus wants to get to the heart of a matter – which is precisely why Jesus would have little to do with the question of divorce as a purely legal matter. He knows us too well and loves us too much to leave us floundering like that – “*who started it...was it justified*”, that sort of thing. In our lesson today, Jesus says “*it was because your hearts were hard that Moses gave you this law.*” In Greek the term used was “*sklero cardia*” – hardness of the arteries! Our Lord knows us, and even if the law contains a provision to repair things it does nothing to tend to the underlying condition.

“*How can mend a broken heart*” a group by the name of the Bee Gees once crooned. Their song went on “*please help me mend, this broken heart, and let me live again.*” The Law isn't very good at that. It can settle a dispute, but it can't heal a heart – and it can't change one either. Try to live by the law and we're at best in the realm of “best intentions” – live in Christ and his love and you can, as Paul says in Romans 6 – “*live a new life.*” The gospel will always tell us the truth – even if it hurts. People who have been divorced know hurt. Worse, people who know the heartache of a bad marriage, of a relationship that started so wonderfully only to see the cares of this world and our own sinful selves wear it down – know hurt.

God hates divorce – let's be clear about that. But why wouldn't God hate something that hurts his people? But God hates it when marriage becomes bad all the more. That is a hurt his word of forgiveness alone can address. Jesus offers no loopholes in this lesson – his disciples true to form ask him about his rather astonishing response to the Pharisee's question – these guys were probably a little off kilter themselves by what Jesus said – our Lord taking the question from creation to the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment given to protect marriage.

But that is God's nature – to protect the things he loves. But when hurt and division happens, and God knows, like I suppose every car manufacturer and insurance company knows, that things in this life do not go as planned – you have to trouble shoot and fix cause things break down all the time – the solution is not a simply a good, legal divorce, but the gracious word of forgiveness by the author of our salvation – Jesus. To those who receive him, he gives the right to be called children of God – those whom it seems always have a place in this Savior's arms. AMEN