

Mutual Respect and Equality

Intro. The background to the gospel is a series of teachings from last week, this week and next week about how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God and how difficult it is to be disciples of the Lord.

I. As usual, the first impression of the purpose of the Pharisees asking the Lord a seemingly innocent question is disguised by them. It is another in many attempts to trick him to get in trouble with either Jewish law or the Roman rulers and get rid of him. The point of the gospel is not really about divorce and remarriage. It is about setting a trap for the Lord and his response to it. The Pharisees asked if divorce was “lawful.” When the Lord asked what Moses “commanded,” what the law said, they referred to the book of Deuteronomy (24:1-4). This

showed they already knew the answer and were not sincere in their question. Moses didn’t *command* anything. The Pharisees had to back off and admit Moses *allowed, permitted* a concession to the original law. The Lord reminded them it was because of “human stubbornness.” [*Paulist Bible Commentary*, Paulist Press, 2018, page 1005; *The Gospel of Mark*, J.R. Donahue, S.J., and D. Harrington, S.J., Liturgical Press, 2002, page 293.] The Lord went further back in scripture to show them what the original teaching was in Genesis. Woman and man were created from the same flesh and were therefore joined as one in the relationship of husband and wife. And equal. The culture of that day gave all rights to men. But it was not that way in the beginning when God created human beings. Just to be sure the Pharisees and his disciples

understood this, he again used the example of a child to underscore the complete dependence a child had on others, particularly parents and that children are an important part of the marriage relationship. This was the way into the kingdom of God the Lord was building. The Pharisees not only failed in their attempt to force the Lord into making a mistake, but unwittingly revealed the right relationship in marriage: equality. That was counter-cultural and a comment on the double standard for men and women at that time. As a society and a church we still struggle with that.

Concl. The Lord's response to the attempt by the Pharisees to get him to contradict Moses and tradition was to make them recall what the earlier and original scripture in Genesis said about the right relationship between man and woman: **both** were

made in God's image *and equal* in the relationship. The demanding reality of being a disciple of the Lord is difficult and only through the death and resurrection of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit can we achieve some resemblance to the ideal relationships both with God and each other. [*Paulist, Bible Commentary*, page 1005] The Lord "had a vision of a restored creation in which unity and mutuality in marriage mirror God's original plan." [*Sacra Pagina*, page 298] The Lord reminds us of the ideal and balances that with a pastoral sensitivity to people's situations. **Being a disciple of the Lord is never easy but mutual respect for one another made in the image of God brings us closer to the Kingdom of God.**

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