

ARTICLE 3



The Lumen Fidei Institute

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Marriage a gift from God – The Church's Understanding through Scripture

Christ nullified the concession of Moses

So far, we have seen that a false notion of marriage has become prevalent throughout western society even amongst Catholics. We have seen in the Gospels how Jesus, in both Matthew 5:31-32 and in Luke 16:18, nullified the concession, given to the people by Moses, which permitted divorce. The Church confirmed this interpretation at both the council of Florence and the Council of Trent therefore any confusion as regards the Church's position on marriage can only be through ignorance, or through wishful thinking, or else through a disregard for the teaching authority of the Church.

Unfortunately our fallen human nature tends to regard the prohibition on divorce as a negative instruction, a “thou shalt not”, if you will. This is not how God means it and this is seen when we look at the two further Gospel texts where Christ addresses the topic of Divorce. These are Mark 10:2-12 and Matthew 19:3-12.

Christ speaks in Matthew and Mark

“And the Pharisees coming to him asked him: Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. But he answering, saith to them: What did Moses command you? Who said: Moses permitted to write a bill of divorce, and to put her away. To whom Jesus answering, said: Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you that precept. But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother; and shall cleave to his wife. And they two shall be in one now they are not two, but one. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house again his disciples asked him concerning the same thing. And he saith to them: Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if the wife shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.” (Mark 10: 2-12)

“And there came to him the Pharisees tempting him, and saying: Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? Who answering, said to them: Have ye not read, that he who made man from the beginning, Made them male and female? And he said: For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be in one flesh. Therefore now they are not two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. They say to him: Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorce, and to put away? He saith to them: Because Moses by reason of the hardness of your heart permitted you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that shall marry her that is put away, committeth adultery.” (Matt 19:3-12)

God's understanding of Marriage

These texts are identical in their essence and they give us a deeper understanding of God, of the

Pharisees, of human nature and of marriage as God intended it to be.

The Pharisees in both passages are said to be tempting Jesus. Jesus' position regarding divorce must therefore have been common knowledge and so the Pharisees are trying to set Jesus up. By getting Jesus to publicly contradict the law of Moses the Pharisees hope to show that he cannot be the messiah. They are not seeking the truth but rather they are becoming more and more concerned at the large following that Jesus is attracting. Jesus in reply, brings them back to the creation of man at the beginning of time prior to the law of Moses. He says that Moses allowed a compromise because the human heart had become hard but He shows clearly that God had never intended divorce. Divorce is one of the consequences of sin.

The Genesis Account

In the book of Genesis to which Jesus directs us, God's reveals his plan for married life.

“And God created man to his own image: to the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. And God blessed them, saying: Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures that move upon the earth.” (Gen 1:27-28)

“And the Lord God said: It is not good for man to be alone: let us make him a help like unto himself... Then the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon Adam: and when he was fast asleep, he took one of his ribs, and filled up flesh for it. And the Lord God built the rib which he took from Adam into a woman: and brought her to Adam. And Adam said: This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh. And they were both naked: to wit, Adam and his wife: and were not ashamed. (Gen 2:18, 2:21-25)

The essence of and requirements for marriage

The two passages from Genesis when taken with Christ's Gospel teachings concerning divorce give a clear understanding of marriage as God intended it to be and also of what was never intended for marriage. From these scriptural passages the Catholic Church has developed its understanding of marriage and has defined both the essence of true marriage and the essential requirements for a valid marriage.

One Man and One Woman

From Genesis, and re-affirmed by Christ in both Matthew and Mark, we learn that marriage must be between one man and one woman.

“Have ye not read, that he who made man from the beginning, Made them male and female? And he said: For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be in one flesh. Therefore now they are not two, but one flesh.” (Matt 19:4-6)

Open to Life

Also from Genesis comes the Church's teaching that marriage must be open to life. In Genesis God blessed the man and the woman saying “increase and multiply”. I like to see this in a threefold way. Children are first and foremost a blessing from God on marriage. Secondly it is an invitation to men and women to increase and multiply. Thirdly it is a command from God outlining the primary purpose of marriage.

Marriage is Indissoluble

From the Gospel passages concerning divorce comes the teaching that marriage is for life and that it is indissoluble. “What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. (Matt 19:6)

Marriage must be a Free Decision

Finally the Church introduces us to the concept of freedom as it applies to marriage. The couple must be free to marry that is, there must be no impediments to the marriage. The couple must also be free from coercion in the exchange of their vows. The consent of both parties to the marriage must be freely given.

To summarise, the parties to a marriage must consist of one man and one woman, they must be open to life, they must be free to marry, and the marriage is for life. The couple must also freely consent to the marriage. If any of these essential elements are missing from either party then no marriage can be contracted.

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