

“From the Beginning”

There is an interesting Greek word here in our text, the one translated as “test” – as in, “Pharisees came up and in order to test Jesus asked ...” What is interesting is that this same Greek word is sometimes translated as “test” and at other times as “tempt.”

The devil tempted Adam and Eve – not for their good – but for their fall from God’s grace. The devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness to follow his word rather than the Father’s Word – wanting to make Jesus to be a sinner, and no Savior – no sacrifice for sin, and no crushing of the serpent’s head.

Now the devil is back at it again, this time working through the Pharisees – looking for loopholes – tempting Jesus to say something like: “God says it’s okay to sin in this matter, and in this manner.”

The devil is at work today – right now – with you and I. The last thing he wants is for us to hear and believe the Word of the Lord. He wants us to chase loopholes – rather than deal with the elephant in the room --- divorce.

The truth is that many among us are divorced – and some are remarried. As Jesus speaks His Word into our ears today – will we be like the Pharisees, “tempting” God – or, as little children, receiving His Word, His ruling of our lives, with our “Amen” of faith?

“Is it lawful?” Well, lawful according to whom? According to me? Do I get to make my own laws – authorize my own actions – say what is okay by me?

Jesus knows the hearts and minds of the Pharisees – and OURS as well – so He asks a leading question. “What did Moses command you?” They think they hold the trump card with Moses. Moses said it was okay – that a man could write a certificate of divorce and send his wife away.

Its true, in Deuteronomy 24, God working through Moses, permits divorce. Notice, He doesn’t command divorce. He knows its going to take place amongst sinner – but He doesn’t say it’s okay with Him. He isn’t giving sinners a loophole. Divorce doesn’t come from Him – it comes from “the hardness of your heart” He says.

Divorce comes from despising the gift of a spouse that the Lord has given and desiring another. It comes from the sinful thoughts, words and deeds that we inflict upon one another. It comes from an unloving, stubborn refusal to change our sinful ways – and to love our spouse as God desires.

It comes from a failure to confess our sins against one another – and to forgive one another. It comes from finding loopholes for our sin – rather than dealing with our sin the way God deals with our sin – through Christ Jesus.

“Is it lawful” according to God? Does He authorize it? He is very clear when He says – “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

No, you are not to separate what God has joined together – you are not to divorce your spouse. It was not this way from the beginning – it is not according to God’s “very good” design for creation – and it is “not good” for you. That’s why in Malachi 2 (v. 14) He says that He hates divorce.

Sometimes when we are looking for loopholes for our sin – we totally overlook the good gift that God has given – in this case, His gift of marriage. Marriage is a profound mystery. In the Scriptures marriage is a picture of the communion of Christ and His Bride the Church. In marriage, “they are no longer two but one flesh.” What does that mean?

We don’t fully understand this one flesh union – but it’s more than we imagine and realize. It is great. It is profound. It is a gift that God gives, and intends, for husband and wife.

Divorce separates this one flesh union – it rips and tears apart what God has joined together – and so it hurts, it’s painful. Divorce is not “easy” – even if we try to make it so, or pretend that it is. In many ways it is like a death where there is loss and mourning – a hole in our life – a loss of what God has given.

In Matthew 19:9 Jesus speaks of divorce in the case of unfaithfulness – when the husband or wife has had sexual intercourse with one who is not their spouse. This is not a loophole. Jesus is pointing out that a divorce has taken place by such unfaithfulness – that the one flesh union is torn apart in order to join your body with another.

St. Paul also speaks of abandonment – when a spouse leaves the other (permanently). In such a case, that which God has joined together has also been separated. This is not a loophole – an opportunity to get a divorce and say that God has authorized it – it is again because of our sinfulness and hardness of heart.

Divorce is not the unforgivable sin. It is not a greater sin than other sins – but it does deal with a great and foundational gift of the one flesh union of husband and wife.

We are all guilty of separating what God has joined together – purposely killing children and taking them from their mother’s womb – separating the authority of father and mother from God – divorcing God’s Word from my life – separating God’s forgiveness from His means of grace

Rather than looking for loopholes – Jesus desires that we confess our sin – confessing that we have separated what God has united – that we have desired what God says is “not good.”

Dearly beloved, loopholes don’t take care of our sin – they leave us with our sin. God loves you too much to leave you ripped and torn apart with guilt and shame. This very day He sends His Son Jesus Christ to save you from your sin.

Jesus is leading you to repent of separating what God has joined together – and to receive the healing balm of the Gospel. He forgives all your sin and restores you fully – reconciling you to your Father in heaven.

“For to such belongs the kingdom of God.” The kingdom is yours – His beloved little children who live by faith in Christ Jesus. Like little children, we receive and live in His gracious gift – living by faith in our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.