

Take-Home 4. It Was Not So

From the Beginning

What We Found

The Pharisees did not ask whether divorce was allowed. They assumed it was, and asked how wide the grounds were. It was a live dispute and they wanted Jesus to pick a side.

He refused the question and went behind Moses to creation, quoting the two verses from Genesis that we read in Session 1.

He added a sentence that is not in Genesis: what God has joined together, let not man put asunder. The joining is God's act, and undoing it is not within human competence.

Moses allowed divorce, and Jesus says the permission was a concession to hardness of heart. From the beginning it was not so.

Matthew alone has a clause about unchastity. Mark and Luke state the prohibition without any exception, and Paul, addressing two believers, contemplates a separation and still rules out remarriage. Paul does treat a different case in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, where a believer is not bound if an unbelieving spouse departs, and Session 9 takes that up.

The Church has not defined which reading of the Greek word is correct. She has defined the doctrine: the bond of a ratified and consummated sacramental marriage is not dissolved except by death.

The disciples said that if this is the case it is better not to marry, and Jesus did not take any of it back.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE COUNCIL OF TRENT ON WHAT ADULTERY DOES NOT DO

The Council of Trent taught that the Church does not err when she teaches that the marriage bond is not dissolved by the adultery of one of the spouses, and that neither party may contract another marriage while the other lives.

Note what the canon carefully does not do. It does not deny that separation may sometimes be right. It denies that the bond itself has been broken.

Council of Trent, Session XXIV, canons on the sacrament of matrimony, especially canon 7.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. THOMAS MORE AND THE COST OF A MARRIAGE CASE

St. Thomas More was executed in 1535 for refusing to swear an oath, and the whole crisis that produced that oath began with a king who wanted his marriage declared null and could not get it.

He did not die making a speech about indissolubility. He died refusing to say, under oath, something he did not believe to be true about a marriage. That is a smaller and harder kind of courage, and it is closer to the kind they will need.

Historical summary. More refused the oath required under the Act of Succession in 1534 and was convicted of treason and executed in 1535 in connection with the royal supremacy. The two statutes are distinct and should not be merged.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: AN EARLY CHRISTIAN VOICE ON REMARRIAGE

The Shepherd of Hermas, an early Christian writing widely read in the second century, addresses a husband

whose wife has committed adultery. In substance it says that he should not continue to live with her while she persists, and that he must not marry another, so that the door to her repentance and return stays open.

That reasoning is worth pausing over. The prohibition on remarriage is presented not as cruelty toward the innocent party but as the thing that keeps reconciliation possible.

Summary of The Shepherd of Hermas, Mandate 4.

Live It This Week

- **Say the hard scenario out loud.** Finish the Couple Conversation if you did not finish it in the room. Name the hardest situation in which you would still be married, and say it to each other.
- **Write to someone divorced whom you love.** A parent, an aunt, a friend. Not about theology. Just tell them you are glad they are in your life. Tonight's teaching is about the bond, not about ranking people.
- **Read Matthew 19:6 slowly every day this week.** One verse. It is your memory verse, and it may well be read at your wedding.
- **Read John 2:1-11 before next session.** Notice who runs out of what.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. If either of you has been married before, civilly or in any church, tell the priest or deacon preparing you this week, before any further wedding planning happens. A date cannot always be set until that is resolved, and knowing early costs far less than knowing late.

Also. Finish the hardest scenario conversation if you did not finish it in the room, and put Matthew 19:6 somewhere you will both see it every day.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.

Matthew 19:6

Before next session: Read John 2:1-11 before Session 5. Notice who runs out of what.

Catechism: CCC 1614-1615, 1618-1620, 1640, 2382-2386. Code of Canon Law, canon 1141.