

<sup>1</sup> Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them. <sup>2</sup> Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" <sup>3</sup> "What did Moses command you?" he replied. <sup>4</sup> They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." <sup>5</sup> "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. <sup>6</sup> "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' <sup>7</sup> 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, <sup>8</sup> and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. <sup>9</sup> Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." <sup>10</sup> When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. <sup>11</sup> He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. <sup>12</sup> And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

In one pan of the balance we have the perfect will of God. In the other pan we have the concession of Moses to the human situation. Although in absolute terms there is no contest as far as which side is weightier, this is no normal balance. It is a double balance in that one part measures our performance against God's standard, while the other assesses our neighbor's performance against the realities of a fallen world.

In marriage in the church, there are three parties involved; the man, the woman and God. As the man and woman ask God's blessing on their marriage, they acknowledge him and his model for marriage as integral to their relationship. Oneness is the object and goal of marriage, therefore any act leading to separation is an act of violence against God's perfect will. That is the standard we need to promote in the church, and certainly the standard to which we must strive to conform in our own marriages.

Yet when it comes to our neighbors and their marriages, we need to hold up the ideal, while at the same time acknowledging the reality of a sinful and fallen world. The brokenness and pain of divorce is consequence enough in itself, without our condemnation. Jesus reminded his listeners of God's will, but did not condemn Moses' concession to human failure. At the same time, Jesus does not minimize the seriousness of the spiritual consequences. The balance we need to maintain in this life is that between upholding God's perfect plan and pointing those who miss the mark to the redemptive love of God expressed through the cross of Jesus Christ.

**Lord Jesus, as you taught your disciples the perfect way of the Father and yet constantly displayed patience with their short comings, help me to aspire to obey God's will, to repent and seek forgiveness when I fall short, and to be ever ready to show compassion to my neighbors as I share your truth. Amen.**