

“It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him” (Gn 2:18). The Book of Genesis speaks of marriage and the way it joins two human beings, one male and one female, into one flesh, into one single person. The marriage union is part of creation itself. The union comes from a divine act therefore no man can un-bless what God has blessed.ⁱ We know that Adam and Eve were cast out of Eden. They lost paradise, but their divine union is still blessed by God. It is not undone by their sin of pride. “Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate” (Mk 10:9).

For a parallel example in the New Testament, we may look to the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The wayward son wished his father dead, squandered his inheritance and when he recognized the sin of his own pride, he sought to return home as a slave. The father would have nothing of it. He was his blessed son, the father forgave him, and welcomed him back not as a servant but with all the privileges of being one of the family. “Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found” (Lk 15:22-24).

Because of the hardness of the Israelites hearts, Moses permitted divorce. In the question posed to Jesus about divorce, it is helpful to understand how widespread divorce had become. The Book of Deuteronomy held that if a man, after marrying a woman, is later displeased with her because he finds in her something indecent, he may write out a bill of divorce and hand it to her, thus dismissing her from his house (Dt 24:1). However, what was considered indecent was very arbitrary. If a man felt another was prettier than his wife, he could divorce her.ⁱⁱ In the era of Jesus and the early church, Roman Law allowed for the wife to initiate divorce with similar arbitrariness. There was a proliferation of divorce and Jesus took a stand against it. There is great injustice in such an arbitrary system as Jesus was addressing, but we must look beyond the single issue of divorce.

In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is often compared to an unfaithful bride, one that has forgotten the covenant between God and the chosen people. “Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as on the day of Massah in the desert. There your ancestors tested me; they tried me though they had seen my works. Forty years I loathed that generation; I said: ‘This people’s heart goes astray; they do not know my ways.’ Therefore I swore in my anger: ‘They shall never enter my rest’” (Ps 95:8-11). The Israelites had quarreled with God, they questioned God’s faithfulness. They were rebellious. God is always faithful to his covenants. Man jeopardizes the loss of eternity when a hardened heart rejects God. It is a mortal sin to reject God, to turn from him, and to never seek forgiveness.

Like the prodigal son, there must be a movement on our part, an acceptance of our guilt, and some hint of remorse, for healing of the hardened heart. With that movement, God can work miracles. “I will sprinkle clean water over you to make you clean; from all your impurities and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ez 36:25-26).

Jesus sees a quarrelsome and rebellious nature in certain Pharisees and scribes. In their narrow interpretation of the law, they have hardened their hearts. They constantly find fault with the mercy of Jesus. They reject the demands of the Gospel to lay down their lives for the good of others. In their selfish desire to hold on to power, they harden their hearts. They reject Jesus. Ultimately, these quarrelsome Pharisees and scribes will treacherously plot to kill Jesus.

Hardened hearts are not the sole province of the Pharisees and scribes. When injustice rules our hearts, then we can seek a divorce from God. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done” (Lk 22:42). Is our prayer the prayer of Jesus, the prayer of self-surrender and sacrifice? Or do we assert our will over and above God’s commandments? Do we doubt that God is the author of marriage and abide by manmade rules that redefine it? Do we doubt God is the author of life, and seek to deny others the right to life, based on manmade rulings that deny the unalienable right to life given by God? Do we reject the common good, because we assert that our selfishness is more important than sacrifice for the good of others? Do we seek to harm others in order to defend our pride and arrogance?

If we find ourselves quarrelsome and rebellious, it is helpful to do some soul searching as to whether or not our hearts have become hardened. “Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it” (Mk 10:15).

ⁱ LaVerdiere, Eugene. *The Beginning of the Gospel: Introducing the Gospel of According to Mark*, Volume 2. Pg. 72.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid* 70