

Matthew 19:1-6 The Proper Interpretation of Divorce Part 1

Alright, we start a new section today, Matthew chapter 19 verses 1 through 15. We have you study guides on the back table so that you can follow along. Matthew 19:01-15.

Again, we are in this section in Matthew's gospel chapters 5 through 25, where Matthew presents five sermons. And the in-between chapters are supplements or supportive teachings for that sermon that he is presenting. In Matthew chapter 18 it was the fourth sermon in this series, and the subject of Matthew 18 is The Precepts of the Kingdom. It is a sermon on relationships. So the supportive chapters of chapters 19 through 22 will have to do with relationships in support of and in teaching his sermon in Matthew 18.

Matthew 18 we saw in verses 1-14 The Precepts of Greatness; the disciples debated who is going to be the greatest. And Jesus took a little child, said, "Those who approach the things of the Lord like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom."

In verses 15-20 of chapter 18, The Precepts Concerning Sin. How sin is to be taken care of within the body of Christ and amongst the brothers.

And then verses 21-35 that we took last time, The Precepts of Forgiveness. How we are to forgive one another in order that we might be forgiven.

So in chapters 19 through 22 we have, The Ministry of Relationships in order to supplement His sermon in chapter 18. The Pivotal Point of the Lord's Public Ministry is found in the first two verses of Matthew chapter 19. Pivotal point. The Change in Locations. It is another one of those transitional points where we leave off from one and we enter into a whole new section of the Lord's ministry.

It says in verse 1, follow along. I am going to be reading the literal translation, the King James text if you wish to follow it, but we are presenting to you the literal translation. **And it happened when Jesus finished these words, He withdrew from Galilee and came into the borders of Judea beyond the Jordan.** So His ministry in Galilee has now ended. Galilee is to the north, north region, north of Jerusalem. It is in Gentile territory and we have not heard about Judea since Matthew chapters 3 and 4. So a long time His ministry is up in Galilee and now He is finished in Galilee, He is now at the borders of Judea making His way south and making His way specifically to Jerusalem where He will die on the cross.

In verse 2 it says, **And great crowds followed Him.** All the way down from Galilee all the way into Judea on His way to Jerusalem.

Great crowds followed Him, and He healed them there. I want to mention to you that we were told He healed the crowds as they followed. We have spent some time on this in the past in great detail and great length as to the context in which healing takes place in the Scriptures.

He healed them there. These healings, according to the Gospels, are called *signs* or *miracles*. Sometimes they are translated *miracles*, but the Greek word is **σήμερον** (*sēmeron*) signs for the word *miracles*. They are called *signs* because they present physical evidence to those who are following as to just who Jesus is. These signs were to follow the Messiah. The reason why they were to follow the Messiah was in order to fulfill the prophecies, mainly from Isaiah, that there are certain things that the Messiah was to do and to take place. And so when the Messiah was to come, He was to do certain miracles and certain signs so that the people would know, "This must be the Messiah. He heals the blind. He heals the lame." And so He presented miracles here as the signs to those who are following in order to present evidence that He himself is the Messiah of Israel.

In verses 3-9 as He is on His way, and as He is performing miracles for the crowds that are following, as He is traveling along the Pharisees approach Him. He is going to find more religious confrontation now, the closer He is getting to Jerusalem.

In Matthew 19:3-9, The Proper Interpretation of Divorce. It sounds like a very touchy subject, but it is the reason why the Pharisees brought it up. They saw the crowds coming to Jesus because of His miracles and hailing Him as the Messiah, but they wanted to put some doubt in people's minds, so they wanted to know what Jesus thought about divorce.

Verses 3-9, The Confrontation by the Pharisees. **And the Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying...** See they are trying to trap Him, and so they were testing Him. They did not want to know answers to their questions, they wanted to trap Jesus. **And so they said,** this is their quote, **"If it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife according to every reason?"** And so they put that out in front of Him, in front of the crowds who are now influenced by the Lord's miracles and they want to test Him and put Him into a trap.

Let us dissect this verse. Verse 3 is very, very heavy with information for us. They want to know *if it is lawful*. We have to understand that everything in Matthew is pertaining to the Jews and according to their law of the Old Testament. Sometimes we Gentiles take verses and bits and pieces out of the sections in Matthew and make it applicable to us Gentiles. There are some things that are universally true, and universally true for all; but many times it is pertaining to the Jews like right here. They are making reference to Deuteronomy 24:1-4. They are making reference to that. But I want to let you know, I am trying to emphasize for you that this specifically has to do with Jews and their dealings with the law which the Lord is going to correct and bring back into proper view, back into proper meaning.

The main teachings, not the major, but the main teachings that have to do with divorce for the Gentile is found in I Corinthians chapter 7. I Corinthians chapter 7 has to do with the Gentiles. In Deuteronomy chapter 24 it has a do with the Jews. So they bring their references to Deuteronomy chapter 24 and they present things according to the rabbinic perspective, as to the fact that men are the ones who initiate divorce according to the Old Testament law, according to Deuteronomy chapter 24. That is why it says, "If it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife." They do not say, "For the man and wife to divorce each other," they are making reference to the law in Deuteronomy 24, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" Mainly because in Deuteronomy chapter 24, and I will read verse one of Deuteronomy 24, which is their direct

specific reference: **When a man has taken a wife, and marries her, and it comes to pass that she finds no favor in his eyes, that is a loaded one, huh? Because he has found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.** That is actually in their law.

The main phrase that causes problem is not the word *favor*, "found favor in his eyes," but because, "he has found some uncleanness in her;" and that was the debate amongst the schools of the rabbis and of the Jews. The Hebrew phrase: **'erwat dābār**, *uncleanness*. **'erwat dābār**, what does that mean? Well, **'erwat** has to do with *nakedness* but they did not know how to apply it. What does it apply to? So there were two schools of thought among the Jews:

(1) One was the school of Shammai. And they believed the word **'erwat** for *unclean* meant any sexual immorality. That is what they said it applied to.

(2) But then there was another school the school of Hillel, which believed that the *uncleanness* meant anything, anything at all. In fact they had a manual, they had a scroll, they had a book with all the rules and regulations in it of how you can divorce your wife. A couple of them, if a husband finds that her wife has lost her beauty, they said he can divorce her according to Deuteronomy 24:1. Or if she burns his food or spoils a meal in some way, he can give her a divorce and send her out of his house.

So as you can imagine most Jews sided with the school Hillel, *for any reason*. Those who adhered to the school of Shammai said, "No, no, that's not true."

And if you stop and think about this philosophical approach to Scripture and what things mean in Scripture, it is the same today. We do not have the school of Shammai or the school of Hillel, but we have the school of the Presbyterians, we have the school of the Baptists, we have the school of the Pentecostals, we have the school of various groups. And it depends what each group believes about a Scripture text. And you can come up and show even right from the Scripture itself what it says, and this group will come over here and can say, "Yeah, but we do not hold to that view."

I heard somebody say this week - and I thought I had heard it all - but about a verse, a Scripture which is point-blank, they did not deny what it said but their response was, "We do not go by that verse in our church."

I am like, "What?! You can just pick and choose?" I mean, "What does it say?"

"We know what it says. Yeah, that is what it says but we do not go by that verse in our church." And so we have the schools of thought.

Now you see what they are trying to do is take Jesus and have Jesus pick one. Pick an approach. Sexual immorality only, or for any reason? Figuring that the Lord would choose the sexual immorality, because He is not one to give people license for sin. So that would influence the majority of the people amongst the Jews.

Now look at verse 4, **And when He answered, He said to them, "Did you not read that the One who made them from the beginning made them male and female?"** I want to point out to you that Jesus did not address the schools of thought, He changed the approach. He did not answer according to either school. Now it is interesting here, in changing the approach - I want you to follow this as we follow the Lord's teaching - is the Lord is changing the approach to instead of trying to find a way out of marriage, let us try to find a way to stay in marriage. Because now He is changing the whole approach. That is what the schools say, and that is what people are following as far as getting out of marriage, but I say to you from the beginning what was the Lord's purpose for marriage to begin with? And let us stick with that. Let us find a way to stay married, not try to find a way out of marriage, because what God intended for marriage should be the motivating factor, not what people want or do not want.

So Jesus makes reference to Genesis 1:27, **Did you not read that the one who made them from the beginning made them male and female?** From Genesis 1:27. Interesting, and I point this out to you, it does not say *man and woman*, it says *male and female*. You can argue gender all you want to, but even Jesus points out God made them male and female so that they go together and become one. So, "Did not you read that from Genesis 1:27?" and He knows they have.

Verse 5, as He quotes now from Genesis 2:24, **And He said, "On account of this a man will leave father and mother, and shall be joined, the Greek word is the word *glued*, to his wife, and the two will be one flesh." So that they are no longer two... So, how do you divide up two when there is not two, there is one? ...but they are one flesh. Therefore, what God joined together... and the word *joined* is the word *to couple together, to yoke together*. What God joined together, let not man separate.**

I show you again a technical term so that we can notice these technical terms in the text. He says, "What God has joined together," not who. It is God that has brought about the uniting together of two people, not the two individuals involved, but the actual event itself, that God has brought them together for a specific purpose.

Now at this point they are going to change the subject back again, because they realize the road the Lord is taking them down. You are telling us why God created male and female, and why God himself instituted marriage, and what the purpose is. But in verse 7, he says, "Why did Moses then give a commandment to divorce?" which it is not a command, it is something that was allowed but we will get more into that next week. But they wanted to shy away from the purpose, the whole purpose for marriage to begin with.

This truth Paul picked up in Ephesians chapter 5 and quoted the same verses, based on the same teachings that Jesus gave here in Matthew chapter 19. What is the purpose for marriage?

In Ephesians 5:22-31 Paul says, **Wives, submit unto your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is in submission to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.**

Somebody actually asked me one time as we are going through this text in a study in Ephesians, it says, "Submit to their husbands in everything;" somebody raised their hands and says, "What is *everything*?" Apparently looking for a way out, which I did not have for them. *Everything* means *everything*. What can I say? It is very pointed and clear.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes it and cherishes it, even as the Lord the church: for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother - and again that is a quote from Genesis 2:24 that we just studied in Matthew 19 - and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery... We are studying a mystery as to why the Lord initiated the marriage union in Genesis 2:24. ...but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

There are two primary functions of the husband and the wife. And these are the two primary functions that I talk about and present with those who come to me and say, "We would like you to perform the wedding ceremony and we know that we must go through pre-marriage counseling."

And I said, "Well, we could go through all the verses on marriage and what the responsibilities are, and I already know what you are going to say. You are going to say, 'Uh-huh, I agree.'"

There was a chaplain over in Puerto Rico who was going to have a marriage counseling session and he invited me to sit in on it to see how this works. And so the two people came in and I was sitting over on the side. And the chaplain said, "This is Bill Klein, he is just sitting in on our session together." So of course they were holding hands and got the look going. And so he starts talking, the chaplain starts talking, and then all of a sudden in mid paragraph he says, "And there is a pink elephant sitting right here on the desk." And they are over there going, "Uh-huh. Yeah. Yeah." They agree. He looks over at me [makes a face]. I knew exactly what he was doing. That is what you do in pre-marriage counseling. You agree with everything so that you can get the wedding taken care of.

But I have two things based on Scripture. You talk about a make-or-break situation, this is a make-or-break situation. I let them know, first of all, it is coming to a conclusion whether they are believers or not. Not just Christians, not just people having the same beliefs and convictions, not just people going to church, but are they believers? Are the followers of Christ? Because there are two things that I ask:

- (1) The Big Question for the wife, prospective wife, "Do you feel God, the Lord, calling you to submit to this man in everything?" Everything.

(2) And to the man, prospective groom, "Are you willing to sacrifice your life for the spiritual welfare of your wife?" Give up everything. I do not care if it is the bowling league, or the night out with the guys, or whatever. Those things are not, I am just mentioning those things on the side, you can take that or leave it. Not that I saw a bowling bag in one of your cars or anything. It is not activities; it is *what is priority?* Getting my wife to the Word. My children, my wife and children getting them to the Word of God. Raising them up in the ways of the Lord. It does not make any difference if they want to or not. It is my responsibility to lead my wife and my children to be raised under the teaching of the Word of God.

And so I asked these two those two questions. Are you saying that by marrying this man you are in a spiritual role of being in submission to your husband in everything as he seeks the things of the Lord? And to the husband, prospective groom, are you willing to give up everything, sacrifice as Christ sacrificed Himself for the church? He loved the church so much He sacrificed everything for it, are you willing to do that? To deny yourself and take up everything you love to do for the spiritual welfare and well-being of your family? That is why I have not done many weddings. I did not say I have not done any, I said that is why I have not done many. Because very few, if any, agreed to those terms.

Submission is a bad word. It is the s-word next to *sin* that people do not like to talk about, *submission*. And the other s-word is *sacrifice*. Give up myself? Is that what I am doing? Personally, I should already be surrendering myself to Christ. I should already be sacrificing myself for the good of all of those around me. But now I am taking on a responsibility, personal responsibility for this.

So that is the main question that I present to people when they come in for the marriage counseling. If they want to get into the other verses that have to do with the responsibilities of husband and wife in the presence of the Lord, I am more than happy to get into it. But you have to get past those two first. If you cannot get past those two there is no sense in talking about it.

Now the second big question is for those who have married or are contemplating divorce, concerning divorce itself. And again I can go through all the Scriptures that have to say about believers should not divorce - we will get into it a little bit next week in the I Corinthians 7 section where it is the divorce Scriptures for Gentiles - is that a Christian is not to initiate divorce, whether it is man or woman. Is not to initiate divorce and to be faithful to the calling that the Lord has given. So I ask one question. When people come to me and say, "Well, I am thinking of divorcing my wife it is just not working out."

Now, that is the main reason by the way. Or, "I am thinking of divorcing my husband because it is just not working out." Now I do not know what that means, *not working out*, I do not want to find out. Sometimes I get ear full by the hour of why it is not working out, which just tells me, and I have told you this before. I would put all counselors out of business if I hung a shield outside this door saying Counseling and people came in for marriage counseling. There is only one reason you are having problems in marriage: You got married. It puts an end to the problem. What do you want? You are talking about you made a decision to live with another human being in the household, you are both different, you both irritate each other. The love fest

has worn off and now you are complaining because you are living with another human being. That is the problem. And that is what I Corinthians 7 brings out. Paul says, "You should be like me, but if you do get married," he says, "here is a whole list of things you can expect as problems and difficulties within the marriage relationship." So make sure that you are ready for these so that you are not initiating divorce. So you are ready for it because you are in service to Christ.

So here is my question. I know I strayed a little bit, did not I? So my question about those who come to me and say, "I am thinking of getting divorce." And you know the story - here is another, here I am going another way, I am going not going to deal with the question yet - of a gal who came down from LA, who was pregnant with her second child, and decided she did not love her husband anymore, and that she wanted to get divorced and get married to her boyfriend from high school. And she came up here to talk to me about it. And her question was, "Do you know of any Scripture that is going to allow me to do this?" And that is basically the motive that people have when they are sharing, "I am going to get a divorce." They already know somebody is going to tell them, "Well that is not right, it is against God's Word, it is against God's purposes." But I mentioned it anyway. I guess maybe they are waiting for someone to say, "Hey, do you know about the Scripture over here that says if you are age 34 and you are five foot nine, you are able to divorce your wife." Like there is some kind of clause in there where you can divorce.

So here is my question. Do not let me stray again. Here is my question for those, or the one who comes and says, "I am contemplating divorcing my wife or my husband." I say, "What does the Lord want you to do?" I heard what you want to do. You can tell me all your problems you want to, I have got one question, *what does the Lord want you to do?* Have you sought out what the Lord wants you to do?

It is both a pre-marriage question - are you are you getting ready to get married because it is what the Lord wants you to do? And here are the two responsibilities and the two functions within marriage. And if you are married, and you are a believer, and you want to get a divorce, did you seek the Lord? What does He want you to do? I do not know. I am taking a wild guess and I maybe should not represent the Lord like this, but I am taking a wild guess that whatever bothers you in your marriage it does not bother the Lord. And it all boils down to maturity. It is not about personal beliefs and doctrines and going to church. Because that is what I find, people want me to perform the wedding ceremony because the person they want to marry is a Christian. "We have the same beliefs, and we go to church together." But on an individual basis they have no pursuit of Christ personally. They have no realization of why the Lord wants them in that relationship and how are they going to serve Him in that relationship. The same with the prospective groom.

So I have some very simple questions, but it does not have to do with arguments about what Scripture says. Because you get into the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel about everything. I just want to know a simple question - what does the Lord want you to do? What was His purpose for bringing you together? And of course, the person can come back and say, "Well, it's um, yeah, that is a hard question to answer because I really have not sought the Lord." They do not have the maturity to seek the Lord.

That is why I pray, and I plead with Christians, go somewhere where you can get into the Word; where God's Spirit will feed you, where God's Spirit will put in your mind the consideration of Christ. And learn what He says, and learn what He wants, and develop a relationship with Him; so that when I go to make my decisions, I seek Him for those decisions, not on my own. "Yeah, I am saved and going to heaven but here is what I am going to do." Well, wait a minute, let us back up here. You are saved and going to heaven? Maybe we need to discuss that question. But it all boils down to a personal relationship with Christ not a debate over philosophy of Shammai and Hillel, not denominational philosophy, and debates, but what does Christ want? And if you do not know you can search the Word and find out what He wants. If you say, "Well, I do not know what He wants," then we can search the Scriptures.

This gal that came up from LA and she wanted me to find a loophole for her so she could marry her high school sweetheart. And I said, "There is nothing there." She says, "Well, if there is a loophole, you would know." She drove all the way up here just for that. If there is a loophole you would know. And I said, "Well, I could read you all the Scriptures about marriage, divorce, remarriage, what it is all for; I could read them to you, but the Scriptures are for God's people. My question for you is when you come up and ask me that question, are you looking for the Lord's will? Do you want me to tell you what His will is for your life in the Scriptures? Is that what you are looking for? Or are you looking for a loophole?"

"I am looking for a loophole."

So there are some very simple questions that have to do with a believer's walk with the Lord that you really have to remove yourself from the schools of Hillel and Shammai, and all the denominational thinking, and the systems that we have been indoctrinated with, and boil it down to one thing: Jesus Christ. What does He want you to do? I mean, you can come to me for counseling, and I can tell you what you should do but I am just the same as you then, right? Just my opinion. But my question is, did you seek the Lord? What does He want you to do? And if you say, "I really want to do what the Lord wants me to do," then we can go over the Scriptures.

Next week, we will finish out our section in Matthew 19, we get back to the Lord's answer to this debate that the Pharisees had presented to Jesus and to find out more what has to do with marriage relationships.

Let's close with prayer.