

Matthew 19:7-12 The Proper Interpretation of Divorce Part 2

Matthew chapter 18 is the fourth sermon in this series of sermons entitled The Precepts of the Kingdom, it is all about a sermon on relationships. But as chapter 19 opens up, 19 through 22 will tell us about these relationships as Jesus encountered them as He went on His way. He is on His way to Jerusalem, we studied that last week.

In verses 1-2, this is a pivotal point, He is going from Galilee, which is up north, traveling now south down into Judea where Jerusalem is. He has spent most of His time up in Galilee, where the Gentiles are, and now on His way to Jerusalem in order to die on the cross. And while He is on His way to Jerusalem in verse 3, verses 3-9, He is confronted by the Pharisees. And they confront Him with a very hot topic among them and so we have entitled this section The Proper Interpretation of Divorce because that is what they are confronting Him with.

And last week we got through verse 6, so hopefully we get through verse 9, if not through verse 12 for today.

Verse 3, **So the Pharisees came to Him, testing Him.** So this is not that they wanted to find answers. And those in ministry find it often that people have questions, not so they can find answers but so that they can test you. You might find that also where people get in your face and test you, "Oh you study the Bible. Well, what about this? And what about that?" They are not looking for answers, they are looking to test you, and debate with you, and argue with you.

So the Pharisees, they are a sect, the legalistic sect of the Jews. **They came to Him and said, "If it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife according to every reason?"** Is it lawful? So they are making reference back to the Old Testament Jewish law, Deuteronomy 24:1-4. And specifically verse 1, Deuteronomy 24:1, which says, **When a man has taken a wife, and marries her, and it comes to pass that she finds no favour in his eyes, 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.**

Now there is a phrase in verse 1 of Deuteronomy 24, "If he has found some uncleanness." *Uncleanness* is represented by two Hebrew words '**erwat dābār**, which means in basic, '**erwat** means *naked*. So to be found naked in a sexual situation is basically what it does, it has to do with sexual matters. But it was such a general term for the Jews that they debated about it. There was two schools of thought:

(1) The school of Shammai said that *uncleanness* or '**erwat dābār** has to do with *adultery*; any act of adultery, the husband can give her a writ of divorce.

(2) The school of Hillel was the other school and they said no, that the '**erwat dābār** for *uncleanness* means *for any reason*. And they had a manual and a book, a scroll, with all the different ways and reasons that you can divorce your wife. One of which was if she loses her beauty, you can divorce your wife. If she burns your food, you can divorce your wife. Anything that the husband deems fit for divorce, he can divorce.

And I point out to you again, as I did last week, according to the divorce laws of the Jews in Deuteronomy 24, the man is the only one who can divorce. He can divorce his wife; she cannot divorce him. So if you decide, "Well, I would rather go by the school of Hillel and go by their approach to it," so you can divorce your wife for any reason. It does not make any difference what it is. If you find some uncleanness in her you can divorce her.

So they are coming to Jesus to trap Him. "Is it lawful for a man," see, not a woman, but for a man, "to divorce his wife according to every reason?" See, that is the school of Hillel. And that is what most people would go by is the school of Hillel. They like that open free license to do whatever they wanted to do.

And so Jesus in verse 4, **When He answered them, He said to them...** But He did not answer them according to either school, He changed His approach. Instead of talking about divorce, He talked about what was the true purpose of marriage. **"Did you not read that the One who made them from the beginning made them male and female?"** Reference to Genesis 1:27, not *man and woman* but *male and female*. That settles our gender debate here in the United States and Jesus is the one who said it so when people get angry at me, I tell them. "You got that from the Bible."

"Well, I did, but that is not the point. The point is it is from Jesus. And if you would rather say, 'He is wrong,' you have that freedom to do that if you would like to."

So, **He made them from the beginning male and female.** So He made them male and female for a purpose, so that they would go together and become one.

Verse 5, **And He said, "On account of this a man will leave father and mother, and shall be joined,"** it is the Greek word that means *glued*, **"shall be glued to his wife, and the two will be one flesh."** Again a quote from Genesis 2:24. The purpose is they will become one.

And verse 6, that we left off with last week, **So that they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God joined together, let not man separate.** It does not say *who* God joined together, but *what* God joined together. In other words it was His will that He unites people in marriage. It is the marriage that is the *what*. It is the uniting of two people. **What God joined together let not man separate.** Men and people should not make that decision.

And last week we ended off by me going over to Ephesians chapter 5 and relating to you that Paul took some of this text in relating the purpose for marriage. He says, the purpose not just for marriage itself but for believers in Jesus Christ is that - He said in Ephesians 5:24 the wife represents the church; and as the church is in submission to Christ, so let the wives be in submission to their husbands in everything. And then verse 25, **Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it.** Verse 32, **This is a great mystery: But I speak concerning Christ and the church.** So the man represents Christ, the husband represents Christ. He is the pastor of his family. He leads the family. He leads His wife in spiritual things. Sacrifices Himself to make sure His family gets to spiritual things of God and the family is being led properly spiritually.

So with that in mind we go to verse 7. You see Jesus shifted the emphasis. Now they are going to shift the emphasis back to the original question about divorce, because the Lord just said, "You do not have that right with the purposes that God has." At least up till now He says, "You don't have that right." **So they say to Him, "Why therefore did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce and to release her?"** Because Jesus said, "Let not man separate what God has joined together." Well then why did Moses command - back in Deuteronomy 24:1 - why did he command to give her a certificate of divorce and to release her or send her away? **Jesus says to them, "Pertaining to your hard-heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives."** He did not command. He did not give a command. He gave an allowance to divorce your wives. **"But from the beginning it had not happened this way."** The word *hard* in the term hard-heart means *callousness*. He says, "Because of the callousness of your hearts."

Jesus just gave the purpose for marriage and the work of God up to Genesis chapter 2, before sin came into the world. But then once sin came into the world there came a problem. God's perfect will for the relationship was ruined by sin. **And so He says, "Because of the hardness of your heart (the callousness of your heart) Moses allowed (the word *suffered* in the King James is the word *allowed*), Moses allowed you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning it had not happened this way."** From Genesis 1:27 when He made male and female to the end of Genesis chapter 2, it was not this way. There was no allowance for divorce because there was no sin. But now because of sin, it had not happened that way before sin came. So from creation through the end of chapter 2 before sin came it had not happened that there was an allowance for sin.

But now sin has entered into the world and Jesus has something to say about that. Look at verse 9, **"And I say to you that whoever should divorce his wife, except for fornication, (notice our translation - *except over sexual immorality*) and should marry another, is committing adultery. And the one having married the one who has been divorced is committing adultery."** So if a person gets divorced because of sexual immorality, the person that marries that person who committed the sexual immorality is committing adultery. That person is not allowed to remarry. And the person who is divorcing because of the sexual immorality also has to be careful and we will see what those exceptions are here in a moment.

So Jesus gave an exception. After all that presentation He gives an exception. Jesus is giving the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1. He is giving the exceptions: *except it be over sexual immorality*. So he saying the 'erwat dābār, the *uncleanness* of Deuteronomy 24:1 is translated by Jesus by the Greek word here, πορνεία (porneia), where we get our word *pornography* from and where we get our word *prostitute* from. He says because of πορνεία (porneia) that is the exception to the rule. So here Jesus is saying, "Except for sexual immorality." Sexual activity outside of the marriage is enough for divorce according to Jesus.

Now this kind of sheds light, a little bit on what Joseph had to go through back in Matthew chapter 1 when Joseph and Mary were in that engagement period, it is called *the year of purity*. The pledge of purity lasted one year, and it was an engagement period in order to ensure that the woman was not pregnant. And at the end of the pledge of purity on their honeymoon, and you might have seen this in the film *Fiddler on the Roof*, she must be found to be a virgin.

And so during this pledge of purity, Mary was found to be pregnant. So Joseph being a righteous man, was beside himself. Not only did he not know how this happened but now what does he do? Does he give her a bill of divorcement, a certificate of divorce? Leviticus 20:10 talks about adultery, if she has committed adultery, he can have her killed, stoned. But he did not want to do that, so he made a decision to put her away privately, not make a public spectacle out of it, but actually to divorce her privately, and send her on her way. Until the angel intervened. The angel intervened and said she had not committed adultery, she had not committed fornication, she is still a virgin. **That which is conceived in her is done by the Holy Spirit.** And it was based on that that Joseph went ahead with the proceeding, went ahead with the marriage, went ahead with the ridicule that everybody had for him marrying a pregnant woman, because of the angelic message to him.

So when Jesus gave the exception, what He was doing was saying His absolute will is that man and woman be together and they should not separate themselves and that God has joined them into one, as male and female. And God did it - not out of a custom for marriage or weddings - but as a representative of His relationship with His people. So His perfect will was there was an exception to that in response to the circumstances that have been brought about by human sin. It was broken, the bond was broken, and so He gives them the exception.

In verses 10 to 12, it says The Proper Understanding of Marriage as we continue with the subject. He corrects the disciples because Jesus said, "No divorce except sexual immorality," and the disciples were beside themselves because they are obviously following the school of Hillel. They want freedom to marry and even more freedom to divorce with divorce rights and remarriage rights. They want it wide open like the school of Hillel says that it is.

So verse 10 says, **His disciples say to Him...** now according to Mark 10:10 they now go into a house and they are in private with Jesus and the disciples say to Him, **"If this way is the case of the man and the wife...** And the word Greek word for *case* is a legal term, meaning *the basis for legal action*. So if this is the only basis for legal action between a man and his wife then **..."it is not profitable to get married.** Because then you are stuck, that is what they are saying, you are stuck. You cannot get a divorce unless there is some sexual immorality involved and we want it free. It is not appealing. It is not appealing to them if it is not free and liberal with divorce and remarriage.

But Jesus said to them in verse 11, **"Not all are receiving this word, but to whom it has been given."** So He says, "This is not for everybody," about the restrictions and limitations that are involved. Not all people can live under these limitations. Now last week I mentioned to you that in this section in Matthew chapter 19, it is primarily addressed to the Jews. This is a Jewish dialogue over the law of the Old Testament, not Gentiles.

Paul wrote to the Gentiles about marriage and divorce in I Corinthians chapter 7. So I make reference to you now, and I encourage you to read it and even learn some of the great principles that are involved there because it involves all relationships. In I Corinthians 7:35 Paul says, **The things that I am telling you are for your own profit; I am not here to put a trap around you. I am not here to put a noose around your neck, but the things that I have to say is for you to attend to the Lord without distraction.** That is what it is all about.

Distraction. We all know what distraction is. We all know how family members can distract us and take us away from the things of the Lord by occupying our time and attention.

But in I Corinthians 7:1-2 and Paul is going to talk to both people, the single person and the married person. Paul says, in I Corinthians 7:1-2, **Now concerning the things whereof you wrote unto me...** So they asked him questions. We are Gentiles. We were not raised according to the law. We got married according to pagan ritual, pagan wedding, we are in pagan marriages. And by the way, in case you did not know it, even though you might have gotten married in a church, there is a very good possibility - notice the words I am using: very good possibility - that you were involved in a pagan wedding because of the address as to what marriage is for and even how churches address divorce today. Churches will recognize divorce right and left. But see he says, "You wrote to me as Gentiles and asked me about this marriage and divorce." **It is good for a man not to touch a woman.** The word touch ἅπτω (haptō) means *to attach: it is good for a man not to be attached to a woman.* **Nevertheless, to avoid fornication (or sexual immorality) let every man have his own wife, and every woman have her own husband.** So the sexual aspect of life should be satisfied and taken care of within the marriage relationship. And he will say later on, "If you are burning with passion, get married, but if you can abstain from marriage," he says, "I have some good recommendations for you."

But what about the Gentiles who are married and one of them receives Christ and the other one is still pagan, still has their pagan ways, and pagan lifestyle, and really does not follow Christ? What about them? I Corinthians 7:15 Paul says, **But if an unbeliever should depart...** First of all, the believer should follow Christ no matter what. You do not compromise because the person you are married to is a nonbeliever. But if the nonbelievers say, "I am leaving if you want to be a Christian and practice the things of the Lord," he says, **Let them depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God has called us to be at peace.** In other words, you are not held in bondage, you are free. If your marriage partner leaves because of your relationship with Christ, you are free. Later on he will say, "You are free to marry, you have not sinned."

But then he talks about the single, the celibate. I Corinthians 7:7-9 he is talking about the person who is celibate or remains single is a gifted person. **For I desire that all men should even be as I myself. But every man has his proper gift from God, one after this manner, and one after that.** Some people need to be married, some people can experience the gift of God and stay unmarried.

I say therefore to the unmarried and to the widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. So Paul is putting himself in the camp as unmarried or widowed, a widower.

It is good for them if they abide even as I am. But if they cannot contain themselves (or exercise self-control) let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. So taking care of the fornication issue, it is better to get married than to not get married and be involved in sexual immorality.

In verses 26 through 27 Paul says, **I suppose therefore that it is good in the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. Are you bound unto a wife? (that is, are you married?)**

Do not seek to get loosed. Are you loosed (divorced) from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you should marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin should marry... That is a girl under the roof of her dad and she is still a virgin. If a virgin should marry she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I desire to spare you. If you do not have the means to underline verse 28, make a note of verse 28, that is what Paul is trying to say. Sure, you can do whatever you want, but such will have trouble in the flesh.

And most people in ministry or most counselors spend ninety-nine percent of their time counseling with people who are married that have trouble in the flesh.

"Well, do you know what he did?"

"Do you know what she did?"

And as I have told you before, it is my blunt sarcastic way of telling people what their problem is without taking up too much time. Your problem is you got married. So how can I help you? You got married. You are living with another human being. You are living with other human beings. In your neighborhood you living around other human beings. And the real question is does a person have the ability to tolerate, to endure, the differences between them and other human beings? And definitely within a marriage situation what Jesus said about discipleship, "If you want to be My disciple, deny yourself." Denying self is the key to getting along with relationships. It does not matter what you want. On the other hand if you are right then trust the Lord with it, discuss it, pray about it.

But it is interesting that Paul says, "Nevertheless, you have not sinned," if you are a virgin woman and you want to get married, "you have not sinned but you are going to have trouble in the flesh." In fact, in this section in Chapter 7 Paul deals with dads who have virgin daughters. He says to them, "If you have control over your virgin daughter," that is, she is still living under your house and she does not have to get married, "you do well to keep her in your household." As long as you have control. If you have lost control, of course, then the situation goes the other direction and you will wind up either living in her household, or her living in your household.

Paul says in I Corinthians 7:29 in finishing up this section, **But this I say, brothers, the time is short: (Listen to this men) it remains, that both they that have wives should be as though they had none.** That is to say, follow the Lord as if you had no wife. What does the Lord want you to do? Seek the Lord for you and for your family. Most of the problem with Christian men today is that they get married and have children and they know what the Lord wants them to do, but they cannot do it because they are compromising because the wife will get mad at them, and the kids will get mad at them, and the wife wants to do something different, and he wants to do something different, and he is seeking the Lord. So Paul says, "Well, it is a simple solution, be as though you are not married." What does the Lord want you to do? Because after all she - two things she is supposed to do:

- (1) If she is a Christian, she is supposed to be in submission to you for everything.

(2) If she is not a Christian and she does not like living in your household while you are following the Lord, she probably would leave. Paul says, "Let her leave." That is a command. That is not a choosing situation.

So Paul says Gentiles are in a really tough situation. Since we were not raised under the law, we were not raised under the Jewish system, we have mixed marriages. Just about every marriage has a tint, if not more, of pagan marriage in it. Pagan things of the world. Philosophy. We get married and our family members on both sides are not Christians and so we are involved in the pagan social system and have to please people and they do not understand when we say, "I am sorry, I belong to Christ now, and Sunday is the day we gather together around the Word, so we are going to have to bow out and go be with the Lord's people." They do not understand that because we are a mixed bag.

So finishing up at verse 12, **For there are eunuchs.** A *eunuch* is somebody who is not able to produce human life. **For there are eunuchs who were born this way from the womb of their mother** (born without testicles) **and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men** (that is, they were castrated) **and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs of themselves** (that is, they voluntarily submitted to the grace of God to remain unmarried). **They made eunuchs of themselves, on account of the kingdom of Heaven. The one being able to receive it, let him receive it.** Remember Jesus said, "Not all can receive this." There are only certain people that can stay single or married in the right way. And there are eunuchs that are made eunuchs to the point that they physically are not able to participate or voluntarily not able to participate. To those people a special grace is given to be single. It is a gift.

In other words, what Paul is saying is - that rascal, you know? If you read Paul's writings, I would love to have been around when he was around because he did not mince words. Some of the things I have said, I am sure when I see him in heaven he might have some words for me, but I am sure he would have said some things that I said. "Well, you got married, so are you going to can serve the Lord or not?" I mean it is as simple as that.

"Well... you know... she...."

It does not matter what she does. Are you going to serve the Lord or what?

Like I said last week, the main question is, with all the problems and situations and circumstances that we face, the main question is, what does the Lord want you to do? There are people who are saying, "I am going to divorce my wife." Well, the question is what does the Lord want you to do? Not reciting to them from the Bible because in case you have not noticed that more and more churches and more and more pastors are not going by the Bible anymore. "It does not matter what the Bible says. You can quote to me about marriage and divorce from the Bible but if I want to divorce and get remarried, I will do it. Who is going to can stop me? And there are plenty of churches in town that will receive me if I do it." So the question is not *what does the Bible say?* Not *what do you say?* Not *what do you want to do?* What does the Lord want you to do in light of everything? Have you prayed? Have you sought Him? What does He want you to do?

So we will continue on with Matthew chapter 19 next week. Let's close with prayer.