

Divorce 7-24-05

Matthew 19:1-12 (NIV)

¹When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. ²Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. ³Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" ⁴"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' ⁵and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?' ⁶So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." ⁷"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" ⁸Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. ⁹I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." ¹⁰The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." ¹¹Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. ¹²For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

I received a liturgical homily booklet on Matthew in the mail and hung on to it since we are in Matthew, but noticed it skips chapter 19. I wonder if that is because it deals with the two topics we don't want to hear about, marriage and money. One thing about preaching through the Scriptures is the assurance that all the topics will be addressed. We can't skip some because we don't like them, or avoid others because we want to avoid conviction. (2 Timothy 3:16-17) The Word of God challenges our society's standards with heavenly truth. It challenges the compromises we have come to accept. If we are an average group of American adults, half of us will be among those who have experienced divorce. Our natural tendency would be for those of us who have had a divorce to tune out the message. I ask you not to do that for your sake. Chances are you will remarry. You need this message, not to beat yourself up over your past, but to prepare you to see things from heaven's perspective in the future.

For those who have not experienced divorce, the natural tendency is to think this message is not for you. You can benefit from Jesus' words as much or more than those who have been through a divorce. For you young people who have not married yet, this can help you more than any other group, by preparing you for marriage.

Our text begins with Jesus leaving Galilee. He will not return until after the resurrection. (Matthew 16:21)

¹When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan.

This was the region known as Perea. It was ruled by Herod Antipas at the time. It seems that Jesus was directed there to minister to that region until the Passover week.

Commented [notes1]: ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.
Matthew 16:21 (NIV)

²Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

With the exception of the feeding of the 4000, the last year of Jesus' ministry had few crowds. He had been teaching his disciples and preparing them for what was to come. Now the crowds are back, during what is probably the last month before the crucifixion. John had ministered in this region, but Jesus had not spent much time here. (John 10:40) It was their time to hear the good news. Jesus healed them as a sign that He was the Messiah and that His teachings were from God. (Matthew 8:16-17)

Commented [notes3]: ⁴⁰ Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. Here he stayed John 10:40 (NIV)

³Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

The Pharisees took an unusual tactic. They were the ones that always wanted to go overboard in enforcement of the Law. Yet, they knew that Jesus interpreted the Law in a way that was stricter. They were masters at rule enforcement, at making demands on others. (Matthew 23:4) Jesus came with a challenge to their interpretations that made it impossible for them to point the Law at anyone but themselves. They decided to take one of Moses' instructions that provided the wiggle room they loved so much and see if Jesus would contradict their interpretation of Moses. This question was a debate that they had among themselves. If Jesus tightened up this legality, it would look like He was contradicting their most honored prophet, Moses, and some of the great rabbi. It wasn't an honest question. It was a test. But for our sake and the sake of those listening, Jesus answered them.

Commented [notes4]: ¹⁶ When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases." Matthew 8:16-17 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ⁴ They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Matthew 23:4 (NIV)

He answered with the words Moses recorded from God.

⁴"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?⁶ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.

They couldn't very well accuse Him of contradicting Moses when He answered by quoting God. "Haven't you read..." They must have hated to hear that expression. Whenever He started with that line they knew He was going to use the Word they prized themselves in knowing so well to show them their error. (Matthew 12:3)

Commented [notes6]: ³ He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? Matthew 12:3 (NIV)

God created them male and female (singular), not females. Adam had no options in the Garden. (Genesis 2:24) The two become one. They made a covenant before God. The woman was supposed to be a virgin. The blood on the conjugal sheets was a sign of the covenant being sealed. That won't happen again. The two have covenanted before God that their lives will be one. (Malachi 2:14)

Commented [notes7]: ²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. Genesis 2:24 (NIV)

God is sovereign. He has brought them together. Therefore, Jesus said, don't let man separate them. It is God that brings them together, it is man that separates. Many people say, "We made a mistake." You might have made a mistake but God never does. (1 Samuel 15:29) He sovereignly brought the two of you together and in working through your differences will draw you closer to Him.

Commented [notes8]: ¹⁴ You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Malachi 2:14 (NIV)

That is it. That is what Jesus' taught. He based His answer on what God said in the Garden. Like the Pharisees, we look for loopholes. Surely there must be some way out of this deal. I'm not happy. I'm not fulfilled. Me, me, me, me! Well, Jesus did give one loophole. When the one party breaks the covenant through sexual unfaithfulness, the

Commented [notes9]: ²⁹ He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind." 1 Samuel 15:29 (NIV)

other is freed. Some commentators believe that the prophet Malachi also included violence as an acceptable reason to divorce. (Malachi 2:16) Jesus didn't include that here. The Pharisees weren't satisfied. What about the exceptions that Moses gave? ⁷"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

They couldn't claim He contradicted Moses because He quoted God. The next best option was to ask why His answer seemed to contradict other statements in the Law. A careful reading of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 will show that God did not *command* divorce. The passage merely gives a command in regard to remarriage after man has chosen to divorce.

⁸Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. ⁹I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

Ouch! Jesus does it again. He makes them apply it to their own hearts. Jesus was saying that Moses made rules for hardhearted people who just refused follow God's plan. When man hardheartedly decided to divorce, God gave certain rules through Moses forbidding remarriage to their original husband. In His mercy, God made the rule to keep a bad situation from becoming even worse. With the exception of unfaithfulness, when the man remarries, he is breaking the marriage covenant and therefore guilty of adultery. The picture of our relationship with God was destroyed. Instead of faithfulness through thick and thin, it pictures forsaking God when times are tough. Instead of picturing Paul, faithful to the end, it pictures Demas who left the way because he loved this present world. (2 Timothy 4:10)

Before you turn your head to condemn all the adulterers in this church, remember that it was in this book of Matthew that Jesus said that to look on a woman to lust after her was committing adultery in your heart. (Matthew 5:28) Men are more visual and tend to lust after a form, but women are more romantic and tend to lust after an idea. There is a reason romance novels are purchased by women. They lust after an idea in their mind of the husband who is handsome, rich, and will treat them like the queen they are. That, too, is adultery. I'm not lessening the sin by saying we all do it. I just think that when we point fingers, we should point at our own heart first.

Divorce and remarriage only gives you a new set of problems to try to work through. Men, if you want your wife to be the woman you thought she was when you married her, treat her like you did before you married her. The Apostle Paul tells us that a woman's great need is to be loved. (Ephesians 5:25) Find out how she feels love from you and express that to her. It may be doing the dishes. It may be buying flowers. It might be just sitting and looking into her eyes as you listen to her share how her day was. The strange thing is, they don't want to tell you what makes them feel loved, because they figure if you love them you'll figure it out. Ladies, give us a hint. I heard one at a marriage conference that I think will work for every woman. Warm up a little lotion and massage her feet at the end of the day. I guarantee bonus points for that effort. Find out how she senses your love for her and then find new ways to express it over and over and over.

Commented [notes10]: ¹⁶ "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith. Malachi 2:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: ¹ If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, ² and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, ³ and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, ⁴ then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ¹⁰ for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. 2 Timothy 4:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 5:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her Ephesians 5:25 (NIV)

Wives usually express their love for you in ways you don't recognize, like how they dress, fix themselves up to go out with you, homemaking, caring for the kids, and on and on. Do you see that as an expression of love for you? You should. And that should make you want to find ways to express your love back to her. Ladies, it is your turn. We can't read your mind. Help us out. We don't have the intuition that you do. Even if we live in Sedona, we are not psychic. One thing you can do for your man, that the Apostle Paul says is a necessity, is to submit. (Ephesians 5:22) Give him some respect. Honor his decisions and let him lead. It doesn't mean you can't have input, but when you are always vetoing his decisions and leadings, you make him feel unloved and unvalued. Nothing will show your love for him or help him feel secure in your relationship like respect. When a husband hears his wife speak highly of him, it makes his day. On the other hand, when he hears you complain about him, especially to others, it crushes his spirit. (Proverbs 19:13) It works to the enemy's advantage to turn his head when another woman speaks highly of him. You should be his biggest cheerleader.

Commented [notes15]: ²² Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. Ephesians 5:22 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: ¹³ A foolish son is his father's ruin, and a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping. Proverbs 19:13 (NIV)

When the husband expresses his love in ways his wife truly feels loved, she will respect him more. When the wife respects and submits to his leading, he will love her more. Don't wait for the other party to begin. You start. You can only change yourself. Work at building your marriage. Single people, apply this to your relationship with the Lord. You are His bride. (Ephesians 5:31-32) Speak highly of Him. Submit to Him. See His expressions of love to you throughout your day. They are there if you will have eyes to see.

Commented [notes17]: ³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³² This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:31-32 (NIV)

When Jesus said divorce ends in adultery,
¹⁰ *The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."*

You see, it is not just in our day that we have this problem. The Hebrew world was filled with divorce. Some rabbi even taught that it was a virtue to divorce a wife that was less than perfect. No wonder the disciples were shocked. This shows they understood Jesus teaching to mean exactly as we read it.

Commented [notes18]: ¹⁶ So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. Galatians 5:16 (NIV)

The basic differences between men and women will always create friction that teaches us the need to walk in the Spirit. (Galatians 5:16) Marriages that are easy are the rare exception. The rest of us have to work at it all our life. So the disciples told Jesus, "If divorce ends in adultery, we should all stay single." They had the fear of God in regards to a sin like adultery. The Law required an adulterer to be stoned. (Leviticus 20:10) We are so focused on grace that we forget God calls it sin for a reason. He tells us to avoid things because they cause us pain and are inconsistent with who He is. People say they can't stand the pain anymore. Divorce doesn't end the pain. It creates a whole new world of problems.

Commented [notes19]: ¹⁰ "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife--with the wife of his neighbor--both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death. Leviticus 20:10 (NIV)

In regards to staying single,
¹¹ *Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. ¹²For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."*
Some people have the gift to be single. (1 Corinthians 7:7) They were born with a lack of hormones or an independent spirit, and they just don't have a great need to be married. They can focus on God's kingdom. Some are so busy with kingdom work that

Commented [notes20]: ⁷ I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. 1 Corinthians 7:7 (NIV)

they don't have time to think about marriage. I've met a few people like that. I admire them. The Apostle Paul echoed Jesus' comments and added that a married person must consider their mate's happiness. (1 Corinthians 7:32-33) They can't focus entirely on pleasing God. Perhaps in that we have another clue to avoid divorce, focusing on our mate's happiness. If we marry, pleasing our mate is a part of our daily life. Notice the passage didn't say our own happiness.

Commented [notes21]: ³² I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs--how he can please the Lord. ³³ But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world--how he can please his wife--
1 Corinthians 7:32-33 (NIV)

The teaching of Jesus is clear. He knows what is best. We need to help one another with encouragement not to go down the path of sin. (Hebrews 3:13) We need to direct them to the Word, or counseling, or a good book on the subject that might help them. Most of all, we need to pray that they will make it through the temptation.

Commented [notes22]: ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.
Hebrews 3:13 (NIV)

So what do we do if we failed? First, I want you to understand that God doesn't love you any less, neither should your brothers and sisters in Christ. We all fail in areas of our walk with the Lord. We face the consequences of those sins. Together as the family of God we are here to help each other through those difficulties in life and the pain resulting from our sins. When one person suffers from their sin, we all suffer with them. When one person rejoices in the victory over a difficult situation, we all rejoice with them. (Romans 12:15) When we confess our sins and weaknesses, we should forgive one another as God has forgiven us. We are a family. Our family members aren't perfect. Neither are we. We treat one another as we desire to be treated when we fall, lovingly, honestly, and with encouragement to do better.

Commented [notes23]: ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.
Romans 12:15 (NIV)

Let me close with these thoughts. Love isn't a feeling or desire. It is a commitment. Marriage isn't about romance. You can work at that, but those feelings will come and go. It is a covenant you make before God. You commit yourself to another and them to you. It is a picture of our relationship to God. God hates divorce because of what it does to us, but also because it mars the picture of our relationship with Him.

Let me share a story with you I discovered in John McArthur's commentary on this passage. It is especially meaningful to my wife and me as we use to always say, "I am going to die first." This story stopped that.

Some years ago I heard the story of an elderly minister who had been married for fifty years. One morning at breakfast his wife slumped over the table, unconscious. By the time her husband got her to the hospital she was dead. After the funeral he said to his sons, "This is a good day, a wonderful day" When they asked what he meant, he explained, "Well, I know she is with the Lord now. And I am glad she went first. That's the way I wanted it to be, because I didn't want her to have the grief of burying me and of having to live alone."

Some years later that minister was asked to speak at a feminist meeting on the subject of marriage. He recounted his wife's death and his gratitude that she had died first. "Listen," he told them, "anybody who knows the meaning of true love always wants the other person to go first, because they don't want them to endure the pain and the sorrow and the anxiety and loneliness of burying the one they've loved. I daresay that the modern romantic relationships that try to pass for love are a far cry from that kind of feeling and that kind of reality." He was right.—MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The

Marriage is a commitment to be one, to share a life. No one can take the other's place. That is a picture of the relationship God intends for us to have with Him.