

Matthew Chapter 19

Verses 1-2: Verse 1 indicates the close of another division of the gospel (see 7:28). With verse 2 it describes very briefly a journey from Galilee into the district of Judea “beyond Jordan” (Perea). The journey must have taken considerable time, and the events of (Luke 9:51 - 18:34), must largely be fitted into the time period.

Matthew 19:1 "And it came to pass, [that] when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan;"

“Perea,” though it is never so named in the New Testament, was the eastern part of Palestine, sometimes referred to simply as “beyond Jordan” or “Trans-Jordan”. It was a 10 mile wide strip east of the Jordan River starting below Galilee and running 50 miles to the middle of the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. Perea (like Galilee), was a Jewish region under the rule of Herod Antipas.

A road through Perea provided the route for Galilean Jews to travel to the Jerusalem feast without passing through Samaria. The Jews regarded the Samaritans as defiled and therefore avoided them (John 4:9). Near the end of Christ’s public ministry, He had an extended tour through Perea (Luke chapters 13-19)

Matthew 19:2 "And great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there."

This was the last time Jesus would be in Galilee, until after His resurrection. This was actually the very beginning of the last trip to Jerusalem. It seems in this country area, away from the bigger towns, there was less opposition.

Just as today, the humble people can accept the things of God much more readily than the more educated arrogant people, who think they already know everything.

Jesus had just been teaching the deeper things of God in chapter 18. Here we see He took time to heal those who had needs. Jesus' ministry was versatile. He did not stay on just one subject and teach it over and over. He taught how to live a well-rounded life that would be pleasing to God.

Jesus not only taught, He healed, He cast out demons, He raised the dead, and He had compassion on the people for even their physical needs. If they were hungry, He fed them. This tells me that God is interested in every facet of our lives.

Verses 3-6: “The Pharisees” come tempting Him with a difficult question. They want to test His wisdom with one of the most controversial questions of their day, and Jesus proves far superior to their expectations. “Is it lawful:” They sought to challenge His interpretation of Mosaic Law (in Deut. 24:1-5), where a “bill of divorcement” was required.

The stricter school of Shammai held that divorce was lawful only upon a wife's shameful conduct; whereas the more liberal school of Hillel gave the widest possible allowances for divorce. "Have ye not read?" Jesus refers them to God's original purpose in creation that they should be "one flesh."

Genesis 2:24 indicates that being one flesh is one new entity, and is not to be limited to sexual union. The Bible clearly indicates that sexual union does not itself constitute marriage, which is fundamentally a covenantal agreement between two partners for life (Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14, "wife of thy covenant").

Matthew 19:3 "The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?"

Divorce was never part of God's perfect plan for human experience, but every generation has engaged to some degree in this practice. Because of the hardness of men's hearts, divorce was permitted under the law in cases of fornication, which would include all unorthodox sexual practices, that is, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, and so on. While divorce is permitted, it is not necessarily prescribed.

God used the experience of Hosea, a prophet with an unfaithful wife, to teach a spiritual lesson to the people of that day.

This was a loaded question. These Pharisees were trouble makers. They were continuously trying to catch Jesus napping, so they might accuse Him of wrong doing. Instead of saying for any cause, they said "for every cause".

You can see what a difference it makes when just one word is changed. Had they realized who Jesus was, they would have realized that they could not trap Him.

At the time this question was asked of Jesus, there was much opposite opinion on the matter of divorce. Herodias had John the Baptist's head removed, because John said Herod and she were living in adultery. This was a very touchy subject.

Most the people were like the people of our day. They wanted permission to divorce for just any little whimsical reason. Those devoted to God, said that only for fornication, or adultery, could you get a divorce. We will see the Lord's answer in the next verses.

Matthew 19:4 "And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made [them] at the beginning made them male and female,"

"And he answered and said": Instead of referring to the opinions of either party, Jesus called their attention to the original design of marriage, to the authority of Moses an authority acknowledged by them both.

Have ye not read? (Genesis 1:27; Genesis 2:21-22). "And said, For this cause," etc. (Genesis 2:24). That is, God, at the beginning, made but one man and one woman: their posterity should learn that the original intention of marriage was that a man should have but one wife.

Matthew 19:5 "And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?"

"For this cause": Being created for this very purpose; that they might glorify their Maker in a matrimonial connection. A man shall leave both father and mother, the matrimonial union being more intimate and binding than even paternal or filial affection.

And they shall be closely united as though he shall be firmly cemented to his wife. A beautiful metaphor, which most forcibly intimates that nothing but death can separate them: as a well-glued board will break sooner in the whole wood, than in the glued joint.

"And they twain shall be one flesh?" Not only meaning that they should be considered as one body, but also as two souls in one body, with a complete union of interests, and an indissoluble partnership of life and fortune, comfort and support, desires and inclinations, joys and sorrows.

Matthew 19:6 "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

Just as we should do when we are confronted with questions today by our church members, Jesus answered with Scripture. He said in essence: God made a male and a female to be one, not a male and several females; and definitely not a male and another male, or a female and another female to mate.

God's original plan was that one man and one woman should come together and build a family. So many troubles in our society today are caused by multiple marriages. It is even worse when children are involved. They hardly know who their true parents are any more.

Even worse in God's sight, is for two men to become mates, or two women. God called it unnatural use. This is an abomination in God's sight, and we are seeing the repercussion in our society today (Aids). God's plans work. Man's plans fail. Be sure and notice that the male and the female become one flesh. They are not one spirit. The flesh is for use upon this earth.

There will be no marrying in heaven. We will have heavenly bodies to house our spirits in for eternity. This fleshly body that we use here will not go to heaven with us; it will be changed and made incorruptible. When God chooses you a mate, no mere man can tear the union apart. The important thing is to be sure that our choice and God's choice for our mate are the same.

Verses 7-9: The question "Why did Moses then command?" reveals the misuse of (Deut. 24), by the Jews of Jesus' day. Moses did not command divorce. He permitted it. God had instituted marriage in the Garden of Eden. He is not the Author of divorce; man is its originator.

However, to protect the Hebrew women from being taken advantage of by a verbal divorce, Moses commanded that it be done with a “writing of divorcement,” an official written contract, permitting remarriage.

Some Jews tended to take this as an excuse or license to get divorced whenever they please. Therefore, Jesus gave one exception to the no-divorce intention of God, “for fornication” (Greek *porneia*), “sexual sins,” not to be limited to premarital sex only, but it includes all types of sexual sin, such as adultery, homosexuality, and bestiality.

Among the Jews, only the male could divorce, so (Mark 10:12), reverses the statement for His Gentile audience.

Matthew 19:7 "They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?"

The Pharisees misrepresented (Deut. 24:1-4). It was not a “command” for divorce, but a limitation on remarriage in the event of a divorce. While recognizing the legitimacy of divorce when a man “has found some indecency” (Deut. 24:1), in his wife (sexual sin, by Jesus’ interpretation in verse 9), Moses did not “command” divorce.

Here, these people were accusing Jesus of contradicting Moses. The opposite is true. God's plans precede Moses'. Moses did not command this anyhow; He just told them that marriage was more serious, than how their oriental neighbors were taking it.

Matthew 19:8 "He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so."

“Because of the hardness of your hearts”: The phrase underscores the truth that divorce is only a last-resort response to hard hearted sexual immorality (verse 9).

“Moses ... suffered you to put away your wives”: The stress is certainly on the word “permitted.”

Matthew 19:9 "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except [it be] for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."

“Fornication”: This is a term that encompasses all sorts of sexual sins. Both here and (in 5:32), Jesus includes this “exception clause,” clearly permitting the innocent party in such a divorce to remarry without incurring the stigma of one who “commits adultery.”

Jesus told them here, that God's will was that they stay together and be one, as He intended from the beginning. The only permissible reason given was fornication. Fornication covers all sex sin: perversion, incest, homosexuality, and adultery; but this word in the spiritual covers idolatry, as well.

Most young couples believe that marriage has to do with the civil law, and that alone. If you are truly married in the sight of God, it pertains to God's law, and the civil law. Many people who say "I do" are not married at all in God's sight. For a marriage to be approved by God, He must be the one we are saying our vows to, along with our spouse.

If we are not truly one, with God as the head, our marriage, probably, won't last. True love has nothing to do with lust of the flesh. Jesus was trying to make them understand that God wants a husband and a wife to be one. A house divided against itself cannot stand (Matthew 12:25).

Verses 10-12: Since divorce on any grounds was common in those days (rabbinical literature), the disciples felt "it is not good to marry." The severity of Jesus' statement is in total contrast to the society of that day and represents the true intention of God. While divorce appears to be allowed in both Testaments (Deut. 24:1-5; 1 Cor. 7:15, 27-28), it is never encouraged.

This is because it always violates God's original intention in marriage. Jesus' reply, "All men cannot receive this saying," indicates that some are called to be married and remain married; others (who cannot accept this), are called never to marry.

Matthew 19:10 "His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with [his] wife, it is not good to marry."

"It is not good to marry": The disciples correctly understood the binding nature of marriage, and that Jesus was setting a very high standard, permitting divorce only in the most extreme of circumstances.

Jesus, it seems, had further spoken to the disciples about marriage. They felt that, if marriage was such a permanent situation, that maybe a person just shouldn't get married at all.

Matthew 19:11 "But he said unto them, All [men] cannot receive this saying, save [they] to whom it is given."

"But he said unto them": With respect to the inference or conclusion, the disciples formed from what he had asserted: all men cannot receive this saying. For some, it is not good to marry, as for a husband must spend time attending to his wife. So for them, it is more proper and expedient to live a single life as he can be fully devoted to doing God's work.

This probably is speaking of those who want to be married, and are not, who are burned up with lust for the opposite sex. It would be much better to be married, than to be filled with lust.

The Greek tense indicates a command, since a person can't live a happy life and serve the Lord effectively if dominated by unfulfilled sexual passion.

1 Corinthians 7:2 "Nevertheless, [to avoid] fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband."

1 Corinthians 7:9 "But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn."

Matthew 19:12 "For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from [their] mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive [it], let him receive [it]."

“Let him receive it”: Since all cannot handle it (verse 11), Christ is not enjoining celibacy here. Rather, He makes it entirely a matter of personal choice, except for those who are physically unable to marry, either through natural causes or because of the violence of other men.

Still others may find there are pragmatic reasons not to marry for the good of the kingdom. But in no way did Christ suggest that celibacy is superior to marriage. (Gen. 2:18; 1 Tim. 4:3).

Jesus would have no part of their argument about the reasons for divorce, and just picked up with their statement of not marrying at all. This first group spoken of here, either physically or emotionally, has no desire to marry. They were born with no inclination toward marriage.

In some of the oriental countries that had harems, the practice was to fix some of the men so they could not be husbands. This was a cruel practice; treating men like animals.

The third state here, is when a man decides for the cause of God, not to marry. He keeps himself unattached, so that he can give all of his attention to the work God has for him to do. Not everyone is called to that special separated life. Some who have chosen that type of life do not live up to it. It is better not to enter into that agreement with God, than it is to fall away after they have agreed.

God actually made men and women to marry. There is no sin in marriage, as long as it is according to the plan God has for all of us. God does not have the same plan for each person. We must find the pattern God has for our lives, and live the way He has chosen for us. Jesus was not asking anyone to live without marriage. He was just explaining that either marriage, or non-marriage, is okay, if done unto God.

Matthew Chapter 19 Questions

1. What miracle, in verse 2, did Jesus do for the multitudes who followed Him?
2. When would be the next time for Jesus to go to Galilee after this?
3. Why do humble people accept Jesus more easily?
4. Who tried to tempt Jesus to take sides?
5. What one word did they use to change the meaning of divorce?

6. What sin had Herod committed?
7. What had Herod done to please Herodias?
8. When a man and woman are married, they are one what?
9. When we are confronted with questions about whether something is wrong or right, what should we do?
10. What causes much trouble in America today?
11. What does God call unnatural sex?
12. Who will be your husband or wife in heaven?
13. What did these Pharisees say that Moses commanded?
14. What two reasons are the only grounds for divorce in God's sight?
15. Why did Jesus say Moses had given this opportunity for divorce?
16. What does fornication cover?
17. Are love and lust the same?
18. What error did the disciples get from this?
19. What three different kinds of eunuchs are there?
20. Should a person try to be a eunuch, if God has not definitely called him to do this?
21. Is it a sin to marry?