

- be overturned." (Cf. notes on 18:1-14)
4. Grace-merit relationships: the eleventh-hour servants equal to all-day workers by a gift of grace. Our standing before God is not a question of strict, legal accounting but the gift of undeserved favor. (Cf. 18:23-35)
 5. Passion Prediction: the Messiah will serve others even to the point of death at the hands of highest authorities in the land. (See note on Mk. 9:35 after Mt. 18:1.)
 6. Refusal to establish a power structure: greatness is measured by service (20:20-28; cf. 18:1-5)
 7. Jesus is not too busy to heal two blind men who desperately appeal to Him for help (20:29ff; cf. 18:10-14)

Section 47

JESUS TEACHES IN PEREA ON MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND CELIBACY

(Parallel: Mark 10:1-12)

TEXT: 19:1-12

1 And it came to pass when Jesus had finished these words, he departed from Galilee, and came into the borders of Judaea beyond the Jordan; 2 and great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there.

3 And there came unto him Pharisees, trying him, and saying, Is it lawful *for a man* to put away his wife for every cause? 4 And he answered and said, Have ye not read, that he who made *them* from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh? 6 So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. 7 They say unto him, Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorcement, and to put *her* away? 8 He saith unto them, Moses for your hardness of heart suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it hath not been so. 9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery. 10 The disciples say unto him, If the case of the man is so

with his wife, it is not expedient to marry. 11 But he said unto them, Not all men can receive this saying, but they to whom it is given. 12 For there are eunuchs, that were so born from their mother's womb: and there are eunuchs, that were made eunuchs by men: and there are eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why is Jesus operating now "beyond the Jordan" during this period of His ministry? What brings Him here, or, perhaps, drives Him here?
- b. Why would the Pharisees raise the particular question they did? Whereas they could possibly have asked so many others, why would this question be so important?
- c. Before dealing directly with the Pharisees' question about His own position, Jesus cited the Old Testament Law (according to Matthew) and asked His hecklers "What did Moses command you?" (according to Mark). Why did He bring out the Old Testament Law first?
- d. What does Jesus mean when He explains that the Mosaic divorce law was given "because of your hardness of heart" and therefore not in contradiction with His stated principle based upon God's original intentions for marriage?
- e. How, or in what sense, can "the two become one flesh"? What did God mean by this phrase in Genesis?
- f. In what sense does God join the two together?
- g. Jesus quotes from Genesis 2:24, but attributes these words to God: ". . . He . . . made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father . . .'" A close reading of Genesis 2 will not show that God actually said these words, yet Jesus affirms that the words quoted are of God. In what sense does He mean this?
- h. On the basis of what you answered in the previous question you should be able to tell what His affirmation has to say on the question of the authority and inspiration of the first two chapters of Genesis. Is Jesus merely condescending to the "mistaken view, commonly held by His people," or is He revealing the true paternity of that text?
- i. Why did Jesus make the exception to the general no-divorce rule,

- i.e. what is there about fornication that makes divorce a conceivable option for Jesus' disciple whose mate commits it?
- j. Mark reports that Jesus' repetition of His rule applies it to the wife who divorces her husband. Why would the Lord have repeated His rule for His hearers: did women have such rights in those days? Do women need to hear His rule? If so, why?
- k. Why do you think the Apostles objected to Jesus' solemn declaration on marriage, divorce and adultery? What is the basis of their objection? Is it a valid one? How are modern objections to Jesus' teaching on this subject based on the principle the disciples implied in their objection?
- l. Why do you suppose Jesus brought up "eunuchs" as a proverbial basis for His answer to the objection that "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry"?
- m. To what does Jesus refer when He says, "He who is able to receive this, let him receive it"? "Receive this" what? Then, what must one possess or be to "be able to receive this"?
- n. Can you name some "who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven"? There are some very famous ones in the New Testament.
- o. How does this selection contribute to the larger question of male-female relationships? What principles in Jesus' doctrine have wider application than to the questions of marriage, divorce, adultery and the single life, as these are discussed by the Lord in our text?
- p. Of what principles in Jesus' Sermon on Personal Relationships (Matthew 18) is this section an illustration?
- q. Explain Matthew 19:3-12, Jesus' teaching on divorce and marriage, as well as you can to indicate what is positively and what is probably His will for us today.

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

At the conclusion of His message on personal relations, Jesus arose to leave the area where He was. In fact, since the days were approaching for His death and ascension, He resolutely set His face to go up to Jerusalem. So He left Galilee and went beyond the Jordan River to Perea which borders on Judea. There too large crowds followed Him, thronging around Him. And again, as usual, He taught them and healed them there.

Presently, some Pharisees came up to Him with a test question:

"Has a man the right to divorce his wife for just any and every reason?"

He parried their question with another: "What did Moses command you?"

"Moses allowed a man," they began, "to provide her a written statement of separation, and so divorce her."

"But," Jesus countered, "it was because of your gross inhumanity that Moses wrote that precept for you. Have you never read in Genesis where the God who created man from the beginning, from the time of creation, made them a male and a female? This same God said, 'This is why a man must leave the home of his father and mother and become united to his wife: the two must become one family.' It follows that the man and woman are no longer two individuals, but one indivisible unit. Consequently, what God, in His original project for man, has united, let no man separate."

"But why, then," they objected, "did Moses lay down the law that one must give a notice of separation and so divorce his wife?"

Jesus lodged a counter objection: "MOSES PERMITTED (not ordered) you to divorce your wives, because you were so unwilling to do what God wanted. This, however, has never been God's original plan!"

Later, when they were indoors, the disciples again brought up the subject to ask Him about it. His response to them was: "I can assure you that whoever divorces his wife on any ground other than her unfaithfulness, and marries another woman, becomes an adulterer in relation to his former wife. Similarly, if a woman divorces her husband to marry another man, she too commits adultery."

His disciples took issue with this, "Well, if that is how things are between husband and wife, then it is better not to get married!"

But Jesus qualified their statement, "It is not everyone who can accept your conclusion that remaining unmarried is better. Only those to whom God concedes the ability can remain happily single. For there are some people incapable of consummating marriage, who were born that way, the congenitally deformed. Then, again, there are others made incapable of marriage they were emasculated by others. And then there are those individuals who abstain from marriage voluntarily in order to promote the interests of the Kingdom of God. Let anyone accept celibacy who is able to."

SUMMARY

During Jesus' Perea ministry some Pharisees sounded Jesus out on the rigor or leniency with which He regarded the divorce question. He drove them back to God's original plan for man based on the indissolubility of marriage. Any post-creation, Mosaic precept was not an eternal principle but a provisional, temporary concession to alleviate the worst features of a sinful situation. Divorce by either party on any excuse, other than sexual immorality, is itself legalized adultery. The disciples, unready for the thorough-going rigidity of Jesus' position, rapidly surmised that celibacy would be better than the risks of marriage. Jesus, however, stuck to His guns on the original plan of God which included marriage between the sexes, while admitting celibacy as a proper exception in the case of those gifted with the proper temperament to make proper use of the single life for the sake of God's Kingdom.

NOTES

I. THE LORDSHIP OF GOD IN
MALE-FEMALE REALTIONSHPIS (19:1-12)

A. GENERAL SITUATION: GREAT POPULARITY OF JESUS
IN HEROD'S TERRITORY, PEREA (19:1, 2)

19:1 **And it came to pass when Jesus had finished these words, he departed from Galilee.** This formal conclusion to the Sermon on Personal Relationship (chap. 18) is no mere literary device. Events had kept Jesus and His group in a state of tension ever since Peter's confession. Note these connections:

1. Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, then Jesus prophesied His death and resurrection to occur at Jerusalem. Peter rebuked Jesus for this defeatism and had to be sternly corrected, since the cross lay at the center of all of God's plans. (Mt. 16:13-28)
2. As further corrective to their mistaken notions of earthly glory and materialistic messianism, Jesus showed Peter, James and John His heavenly glory. (Mt. 17:1-13)
3. Contemporaneous with the Transfiguration, the failure of the nine Apostles to cast out a demon required private teaching, but Jesus' signal success produced popular enthusiasm again. (Mt.

17:14-22) THIS IS THE STAGING AREA IN GALILEE FROM WHICH JESUS WILL MARCH ON JERUSALEM TO DIE. Amidst popular acclaim and precisely because of it, Jesus repeated His prediction of sufferings, thus stating His battle plan and purpose of the successive campaign. (Mt. 17:22f)

4. Upon their return to Capernaum, the disciples are involved in two events that require His special instruction:
 - a. Peter's presumptuous answer to the temple tax-collectors that Jesus pays the tax. (Mt. 17:24-27)
 - b. The disciples' private debate about relative status in the Kingdom. (Mt. 18:1-35)

These events are all reasonably closely connected, not only by chronological connections, but especially by logical necessity. Thus, when Jesus began to regroup His men in Galilee for the final "long march" to Jerusalem (17:22), chapter 19:1 was already a certainty that, to set it in motion, required only the completion of the intervening teaching.

He departed from Galilee never to return until after His resurrection. (Cf. 26:32 and parallel; 28:7, 10, 16ff and par.; Jn. 21:1ff) **He came into the borders of Judaea beyond the Jordan.** Is Matthew speaking here of a precise period and geographic location or only summarizing a general period and speaking loosely?

1. If he is speaking precisely with regard to the geography, we have a problem, since *Perea* ("the land beyond the Jordan," the Greek equivalent of Transjordania) is not politically "Judea." Further, Mark's language, "region of Judea AND beyond the Jordan" (Mk. 10:1) seems to separate the two areas.
 - a. But what if Matthew is ignoring boundaries established by Roman political divisions and is regarding *Perea* as really part of Judea? That is, by the expression *Judea* does he mean all of Palestine in the wider sense of "the land of the Jews," rather than a precise provincial designation? This would mean that Matthew included *Perea* as *Judea*, or Jewish territory. Then, if Matthew and Mark are strictly parallel, Mark's "and" in the expression "region of Judea AND beyond the Jordan" should be thought of as explicative "even, namely" and rendered "the region of Judea, namely beyond the Jordan."
 - b. It may be that Matthew means nothing more than that Jesus operated in that part of *Perea* along the border of Judea, i.e. mainly in the Jordan Valley and not farther east, deeper into

Perea. This would facilitate the quick trips into Judea implied by John and Luke.

2. If Matthew is speaking only generally, the problem fades even more. It is easier to think of both Matthew and Mark as summarizing the later Judean Ministry which is narrated by John (Jn. 7:1—10:39). Perhaps the events that Luke collects together in his chapters 10:1—13:21 are to be thought of as occurring during this period. Then John (10:40-42) indicates the actual passage of Jesus into Perea, which Matthew and Mark point to here by their expression, **beyond the Jordan**. If we should then follow Luke's chronology (13:22—18:14) from that point forward, with the single insertion of John's account of Jesus' quick trip to Jerusalem-Bethany for the raising of Lazarus (Jn. 11:1-54), located perhaps between Lk. 17:10 and 17:11, then Matthew and Mark's material begin to parallel that of Luke after Lk. 18:14. The net result of all this is the conclusion that Matthew 19:1f merely summarizes the events from the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn. 7:2ff) until just shortly before the last journey to Jerusalem for the last Passover. The specific events are recorded in Lk. 10—18:14 and Jn. 7:2—11:54.
3. Another, simpler solution might be that Matthew and Mark refer to the end of Jesus' concluding ministry, hence He is actually passing between Samaria and Galilee after His retreat from Bethany to Ephraim (Jn. 11:54; Lk. 17:11), hence is beginning the last trip to Jerusalem. This would mean that Jesus came into Perea bordering on Judea and there encountered the multitudes of pilgrims en route to the Passover. These people begin to attach themselves to His group, so He teaches and heals them.

19:2 **Great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there.** Mark (10:1b) notes that "crowds gathered to him again." Why "again"? The possibilities are two:

1. If the Lord is thought of as just entering Perea from Galilee, then "again" means that, although Jesus' popularity had collapsed in Galilee (Jn. 6:66), these fresh crowds swell His sagging popular following once more as He now enters a virgin territory where He had not evangelized extensively before.
2. On the other hand, if this is the last trip, these crowds are bound for the Passover. So, "again" would signal the end of the preceding, relative isolation that characterized His withdrawals from public attention. Rather than indicate the beginning of a popular ministry,

these are people who will travel with Jesus to Jerusalem for His last Passover.

In addition to His healing ministry, "as his custom was, he taught them there." (Mk. 10:1b) Why Matthew focuses on Jesus' healing, whereas Mark underlines His teaching is not clear. However Matthew implies the latter too, by recording two full chapters of situations in which Jesus is constantly teaching, especially in small situations.

B. IMMEDIATE SITUATION: INSIDIOUS PHARISEAN ATTEMPT TO EMBROIL JESUS IN CONTROVERSY OVER DIVORCE. (19:3)

19:3 And there came unto him Pharisees, trying him. Because He is travelling through Perea, a territory under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, some see this Pharisean trap as doubly treacherous:

1. Since John the Baptist had been beheaded for open condemnation of the adulterous union between Herod Antipas and Herodias (see notes on 14:3-12), these Pharisees hope to get Jesus to commit Himself openly on the divorce question and thus expose Himself to the wrath of that consciousness king and his cruel consort. Having crossed into Herod's jurisdiction, Jesus could more easily be arrested, if He made any self-incriminating declarations that might be employed to incite those authorities against Him.
2. If Jesus answered wrongly to the test question, He would lose credibility with whatever group He antagonized, even before beginning any serious ministry in Perea. Perhaps He had taught hard line on divorce many times in other areas (cf. Mt. 5:27-32), especially in contexts where it appeared that He intended to rise above the authority of the Mosaic Law. Thus, these Pharisees may hope to hook Him on the horns of a dilemma connected with His own well-known doctrine. If He repeated His hardline position on divorce, they would show that He rejected Mosaic authority. But if He upheld Mosaic Law which permits divorce, then they could expose Him as contradicting His earlier stand, and therefore as a teacher too inconsistent to be taken seriously.

Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? Had the Pharisees stopped with this much of a question, Jesus could have answered a qualified yes, as He does in verse 9, and there would have been no contest. The controversy turns, however, on their final words: **for every cause.**

1. Because Hillel's school interpreted Dt. 24:1 ("some indecency") in the widest and most lax manner possible, the Pharisees' expression, **for every cause**, adequately states the position of Hillel and asks Jesus to verify or deny Hillel's decision and take the consequences.

See how Josephus, also a Pharisee, states his interpretation in *Antiquities* IV, 8, 23. Josephus himself divorced twice and married a third wife: the first because she was a captive and he a priest ordered by the emperor to marry her; the second, because he was "not pleased with her behavior." (*Life of Flavius Josephus*, §75)

Did the Pharisees hope Jesus' disciples shared the liberal view too? (Cf. 19:10) Compare also the brutal language of Sirach 25:26 which reflects this liberal thinking.

2. The contrary opinion, expressed by the rabbi Shammai, interpreted Dt. 24:1 as referring to something indecent, libidinous or lascivious in the wife's conduct, as cause for divorcing her, a position morally closer to that of Christ. (See on v. 9.)

So, if Jesus opposed Hillel, He would lose disciples who sympathized with that great rabbi on this issue. But if He took Hillel's view, the stricter conscience of others would condemn His laxity. From the Pharisees' standpoint, He lost either way.

Notice the emphasis: **is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for any cause?** These are the Pharisean terms of the debate, based on the unconfessed premise of male supremacy and the woman's inferiority. Her rights or feelings or needs are not problems that seriously disturb the debators, a fact that reduced her to the level of a thing to kick around at the caprice of her Lord and master, the husband. The general tenor of Mosaic legislation tended to protect the weaker members of the Hebrew society against the abusive treatment of the strong. But, as usual, men sought the loopholes in order to elude their obligation to a spouse for whom they no longer felt any affection. The inhumanity of these scholars is evident in the fact that **THESE** are the terms of their debate. They did not interest themselves in solving the profound menace to society created by broken homes, children cast adrift and former wives left to shift for themselves. They assumed that **THEIR** rights and personal feelings were of first importance and their own masculine superiority remained unquestioned and unquestionable. So this test question which sees

woman as naturally inferior to man becomes an instant illustration of how to apply Jesus' teaching on attitudes towards "little ones." (See on 18:1-14.)

Rather than permit Himself to be embroiled in the Jewish controversy to become the target for whichever side He opposed, while talking directly with the Pharisees, He aimed straight at the heart of the problem, the heartlessness of men who refused to understand God's original intention for marriage. Later, when talking privately with the disciples (Mk. 10:10), He could give the kind of answer the Pharisees expected, but did not need. (Mt. 19:9) However, since the disciples had heard the former, they could also learn the latter.

According to Mark (10:3, 4) Jesus rebounded the Pharisees' loaded question by putting them to the test. It is significant that Mark writes: "He answered them, 'What did Moses command you?'" For Jews, this is the proper approach: it is an answer in itself, because it draws immediate attention to the Word of God relevant to the subject. The Pharisees had approached Jesus with the intention of drawing Him into partisan debate on a hotly contested issue based on popular opinions. But, before presenting what will be His own definitive, divine revelation on the subject, our Lord took them straight to the Word of God which would be authoritative and final in the solution of the question at hand.

It is interesting to observe that they did not cite the law specifically, for to have done so would have required that they mention the bone of contention, the phrase, "if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her." He could then have pointed instantly to adultery or fornication as the proper exception. Their indefinite quotation leaves the responsibility for any decision squarely upon Him. They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to put her away." (Mk. 10:4) This is a practical summary of Dt. 24:1ff. "Moses allowed," they say, thus underlining his prophetic permission. However, these Jews have side-stepped Jesus' question, because He is calling for the divine standard, not the concession they cite here. It is not unlikely that they sense that His demand for a citation of Moses' Law is anticipating a hard-line approach. In order to forestall an unyielding position against divorce, they trundle out a Scriptural exception which they suppose will automatically compromise any rigid interpretation He could make.

He waved their obstructionism aside, "For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment." (Mk. 10:5) The word "commandment"

here does not stand in antithesis to "allowed" in the preceding verse, as if Jesus had called for a commandment (Mk. 10:3), then they cite Him a concession (10:4) and He now admits it to be a "commandment" (10:5). He only calls the concession a "commandment" in the sense that divorce per se is the concession, but the method whereby divorce is regulated is by "commandment." The word "commandment" here stands in antithesis, rather, to "no commandment," i.e. no regulation of divorce whatever. Rather than leave Israel to govern its divorce practice by individual caprice, leading to worse consequences, God gave commandments to regulate what must be considered at best as only a concession in a bad situation which did not at all reflect God's original design for marriage.

Therefore, since they failed to cite the divine standard of Moses, He now cites it for them. (Mt. 19:4f)

C: JESUS' RESPONSE: "START LOOKING FOR REASONS TO KEEP YOUR WIFE!" (19:4-12)

1. Adopt God's original intention which was marriage, not divorce. (19:4-6)
 - a. God's ideal is one man for one woman. (19:4)

19:4. Avoiding their superficial cavils and human interpreters, Jesus drove them directly to the highest possible Mosaic principle of marriage: God's foundational principle behind marriage. God, not man, is the Lord of marriage. **Have you not read?** (*ouk anégnote*) The answer expected is: "Yes, we have." They had indeed read, but never understood, the impact of the familiar words. As we have seen, Jesus countered their original question with: "What did Moses command you?" (Mk. 10:3) But since these opponents failed to quote the most significant texts of Moses on the issue, He now appeals to the principle texts, Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. THESE represent the genuinely prophetic, Mosaic thinking on the question of marriage, not Dt. 24:1ff. It should be instantly obvious to the impartial reader that these quoted texts, which are the hotly contested battleground between belief and unbelief today, are, for Jesus the revealer of the mind of God, products of the pen of Moses. Jesus' words represent a verbatim quotation of the LXX translation of Gen. 1:27 and a practically verbatim citation of Gen. 2:24. (See on 19:5.)

He who made them follows many ancient manuscripts, but another series of ancient textual witnesses has "the Creator" or "He who created them from the beginning" (*ho ktisas*, rather than *ho poiésas*). That this latter is the better reading is argued by Metzger (*Textual Commentary*, 47) as follows:

It is easier to suppose that copyists changed the word *ktisas* (which is supported by several excellent witnesses) to *poiésas*, thus harmonizing it with the Septuagint text of Gn. 1:27 (which is quoted in the immediate context), than to suppose that *poiésas* was altered to suit the Hebrew word used in Gn. 1:27 (*bara'* which means "created").

Arndt-Gingrich (456) render *ho ktisas* "the Creator" in our text, because, although it is an aorist participle, with the definite article it becomes a substantive. These data lead to an important observation: in these simple words Jesus deals a mortal blow to any developmental theory of human evolution. He does this in several ways:

1. He implies that the record of their creation is a trustworthy, authentic record. **Have you not read?** Otherwise, why bother? The fundamental point of Jesus' argument against the Jewish looseness of marriage relationships through divorce and multiple marriages, is that, in the text cited, God indicated His original design for man. If this text represents nothing better than "the solidification of an ancient mythology," His argument falls, because it is neither Mosaic (as His argument implies) nor of God (as His argument demands).
2. By saying **from the beginning**, He assumes as proved that Adam and Eve are connected with the true beginning of human history, and that what He will affirm about them in the following verses is to be considered true and binding for the entire human race descended from them.
3. Jesus implies that the moral responsibility implicit in the relation of a heterosexual pair, i.e. **male and female**, proves that God did not create them as amoral animals by a process of successive genetic changes from other species, who could mate according to sub-human, non-moral instinctive urges. Rather, He created the species MAN in two heterosexual types, first the *male* and then the *female*. (Gen. 5:2)

This means that Jesus, in considering Adam and Eve the true progenitors of the human family, so that what is affirmed of them is

valid for their children, therefore sees Adam and Eve, not as animal-like protohumans, but fully possessing every essential characteristic shared by their children, and in whose steps the latter must walk especially in the marriage relationship. In the same vein, just as Adam and Eve are not the invented names of sub-human prototypes of our race, neither are they the mythical designations of legendary figures invented by ancient philosophers and poets to explain the misty beginning of man. Otherwise, how could he appeal to this **male and female** as the standard by which God would judge all men, if in fact there really existed no original **male and female** created by the hand of God?

On the contrary, this human pair, standing side by side at the beginning of the world, represents God's original project, a fundamental element in the ordering of all future society. How many times had every Hebrew male heard those lovely words from Genesis 2:18-24 that picture woman, in contrast to all animals, as "a helping being, in which, as soon as he sees it, he may recognize himself"? (Keil and Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, I, 86) Although the order of creation established male priority and leadership and female dependence (1 Ti. 2:13; 1 Co. 11:8f), a fact made painfully clear after the fall (Gen. 3:16), man's position could never be thought of as one of absolute independence. (1 Co. 11:11f) He was created **male** in view of his **female** whom God would create later. With the woman, man is completed. She is not merely his property, but an absolutely essential ingredient in his full humanness. According to God's original design, as **male and female**, they each contribute to the enrichment of the other and to the fullness of them both. It would be sacrilege for men to interpose a counterproposal of separation and divorce. By saying **and female**, Christ has restored woman to her true position and glory, not in the sense of conferring upon her a new, modern role, but rather by re-establishing her in that ancient glory appointed for her at the creation.

In effect, Jesus is saying that **male and female**, as an expression of God's will, does not mean male and females, either by outright polygamy or by that virtual polygamy produced by successive marriages interrupted by easy divorces. Although it was not His topic, Jesus' logic touches other areas. By saying **He made them male and female**, He eliminated homosexuality and other abuses.

1. God eliminated lesbianism, female and female.
2. God condemned sodomy, male and male.
3. By creating two free, unrelated individuals, He laid the groundwork for legislation against marriage with next of kin and incest.

(However, this principle did not seem to be important during the early years of the race when the early descendants of Adam and Eve necessarily married their sisters.)

It is the **male and female** view of human union that God pronounced "very good" along with everything else that He had made. (Gen. 1:31, 27f; 1 Ti. 4:4, 3) Any other judgment is arrogant, open rebellion against the will and judgment of the King.

b. The parent-child relationship is subordinate to the marriage relation. (19:5)

19:5 **And said.** The most interesting question to ask about this verse is: WHO said what Jesus quotes? It is practically a verbatim rendering of the LXX version of Gen. 2:24. As a perusal of the Genesis text will reveal, the quoted words cannot be the words of Adam (2:23), because, without revelation, he knows nothing of mother or father, but must be the inspired comment of Moses, the author of Genesis. And yet, in Jesus' sentence, the only possible subject of the verb "(he) said" is that mentioned in the previous phrase, "the Creator, He who created." The sentence structure, simply, is this: "He who created . . . made them . . . and said." So it is God who is thought of as saying what is recorded in Gen. 2:24, "For this cause a man shall leave . . ." The only rational explanation that justifies Jesus' attributing to God Moses' words is the assumption that Jesus considered Genesis to be the inspired Word of God. For Jesus, God is real author back of Moses!

Now, if this be true, those who attack the inspiration or authority of Genesis 1 and 2, attack not men or traditions, but Jesus Christ who convincingly sets His own stamp of approval upon the Genesis text. This is further evident from Jesus' argument with the Pharisees. He will conclude that this verse means that God has hereby joined two people of opposite sex into an indissoluble union. (19:6) However, if His proof-text is faulty, i.e. not really God's Word on the subject, so is His conclusion. Monogamous marriage (Jesus' conclusion), if it is to be substantiated at all, must be justified on some other basis, because Jesus' citation of a text that does not really substantiate His argument not only weakens His own argument, but also undermines our confidence in any other conclusion He offers on the basis of OT Scriptures. His word in that case would have only relative, fallible, human authority. The only tenable basis upon which we may have our Christ now is to let Him tell us what we should believe about the OT texts, because, since we are unable to arrive at mathematical certainty about them on any other basis, His

authoritative word becomes the revelation that must guide all our thinking about this subject.

For this cause, in Gen. 2:24, refers to man's reaction to his wife: "This at last (in contrast to the animals he had observed) is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." God says that it is **for this reason**, i.e. because the one woman is so ideally suited to the one man, that **a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh**. In creating woman, God had taken her out of man. In marrying her, man cooperates with God in making her part of himself again. Thus, a union in which the two lives are joined into one is more solid than that of blood ties. To break such a union should be as unthinkable as hacking off the members of one's own physical body. (And yet, men thought it! Sir. 25:26) This is what it means to believe in the indissoluble and monogamous character of marriage.

A man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This is the truly definitive law published by Moses: "**A man shall . . . cleave to his wife!**" Note the future tense: is God merely saying that marriage is the usual expectation when a boy leaves home? What reader of Genesis did not already know that? God is saying something far more significant. Since the Hebrew future is often used for commands (witness the Ten Commandments almost all stated in the future indicative.), is He not, rather, establishing an ordinance?

Jerusalem Bible boldly renders Mt. 19:5 and Mk. 10:7 as follows: "This is why a man must leave father and mother, and cling to his wife, and the two become one body," although they do not consistently render Gen. 2:24 this way.

From this standpoint, then, Jesus sees in the Hebrew future verb-forms of Gen. 2:24 the command of Moses that He sought. (Mk. 10:3, "What did Moses command you?") This permanent uniting of two lives into one is the real Mosaic command, the divine Law, as if God had said to man, "Leave your parents, and become as united to your wife as Adam's rib was physically and permanently part of his own body before Eve was created." Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 715) urges the conclusion that Jesus sees the divine command in this text, because

- a. Otherwise his argument would lose its force; b. the audience

hardly needed to be told that it is customary for men to get married; and c. this is in line with the words immediately following (v. 6).

Therefore, if the parental relation, which is itself a fleshly relationship, is subordinate to this marriage relationship, then to believe Jesus means that neither spouse in a battle between them may "run home to mother," because their tie to each other must be considered a stronger bond, hence they must settle their row and live unitedly in peace.

c. Jesus' conclusion: God's plans must not be destroyed by divorce.
(19:6)

19:6 **So that they are no more two, but one flesh.** From the foregoing premises Jesus concludes that marriage leave man and woman no longer independent, autonomous individuals. They may no longer act as if they had separate interests and goals. They are to move as if they had one common soul. If God formed the original woman with something taken from the first man, He planned that the male and female, now two distinct persons, must be united in marriage as indivisibly as the original man had been when he was alone. From this standpoint, divorce amounts to amputation! (Study the diabolical combination of this concept with divorce in the brutal language of Sirach 25:26 LXX: "If she does not live according to your leadership, cut her off from your flesh!") And if death is the only means whereby a man can be separated from his own body (a unity created by God), the only means whereby the marriage unity (another union established by God) can be dissolved is by death. Or, to put it differently, marriage is **what God hath joined together**. If God is the Lord of marriage, they who enter into it may not act as if THEY were its lord either singly or together, in contradiction of His design for the institution He has established. **What God hath joined together**, as an expression, leads us to conclude that, whereas people usually think of themselves as consummating marriage in the sexual union, it is really God who **joins together**. Any married couple, therefore, is making use of an institution that belongs to God and must do so in the full awareness of His ethical principles that govern their proper stewardship of what belongs to Him. Otherwise, their mishandling of marriage becomes just another sin of misappropriation and abuse of His property.

Let no man put asunder. Jesus concludes that no single individual,

no human ordinance and no group of men has the right to effect a divorce without the consent of Him Who is the Lord of marriage, God. No man may excuse his illegitimate divorce by appeal to the law of the land, because neither the legislature nor the courts of any country have the right to contradict Jesus! Were all the legal systems of the entire world to permit murder or theft, these crimes would never become legal before God on such a basis. Despite all human lawbooks to the contrary, God would still hold the guilty responsible for murder or theft. Any country may pass laws that permit divorce "for every reason," but no one who cares about what Jesus thinks will avail himself of any of these legal means, except in the case of unchastity. (19:9)

Lest modern disciples bent on divorce for the shallow selfishness of "incompatibility" discount the Lord's sublime statement on the high sanctity of marriage as "anachronistic and impractical, because it fails to take into account the personality dissimilarities to which moderns are sensitive," they must be quietly reminded that Jesus pronounced this sentence in the full light of no less than 4000 years of bad examples! He is no mere social commentator with fallible judgment, but the Word of God revealing the mind of God on this as much as on any other subject about which He speaks. (Jn. 1:1-18) He does not need to be told by "enlightened moderns" what is in man, since He knows man inside and out. (Jn. 2:25) His words are spoken in the full light of the judgment whereby the fate of every single and married person will be weighed on the Last Day.

It is interesting to note that Paul's argument in 1 Co. 6:12-20—also based on Gen. 2:24—is founded on the intimate relationship of the believer to the body of Christ. (Cf. Eph. 5:28-31) That is, in the same way that sexual union creates a real, physical-spiritual relationship, so also the Christian's union with the Lord creates a spiritual union. (Cf. 1 Co. 6:17) However, sexual immorality, by establishing with a prostitute a union parallel to that pre-existing between the believer and Christ, desecrates the latter unity. This too argues the theological reality and unquestioned permanence of marriage created by such a union.

2. "Mosaic divorce legislation reflects inhumanity, not God's original family design." (19:7, 8)

19:7 They say unto him, Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorcement and to put her away? Notice the emphasis of

this rabbinic objection: **Why did Moses** COMMAND . . .? Jesus had countered their first question by asking, "What did Moses command you?" (Mk. 10:3) They answered by citing a concession (Mk. 10:4). Jesus waved it aside as a situational permission that did not really represent God's purpose for marriage and was intended as but a regulation to eliminate the worst features of masculine inhumanity. (Mk. 10:5) Perhaps because He referred to this regulation as a commandment (*entolèn*) and certainly because He has solidly established His anti-divorce position on unquestionable Scriptural premises, they attempt once more to seize the advantage by reminding Him that Dt. 24:1ff is, after all, divine legislation, an insinuation that He has made Moses contradict himself by giving commands which contradict the original commandment concerning marriage in Gen. 2:24. Notice the shift in their argument: earlier they had argued against Jesus' intended hard-line stand by asserting that Moses PERMITTED. Here, against His citation of the original family design of God, they argue that Moses COMMANDED.

Study this Pharisean reaction carefully: even the Lord's correct exposition of Genesis cannot break their deeply ingrained habit of ignoring God's original design for marriage during their conventional debates on divorce. Their corrupt heart is exposed by their over-attention to a concession justifiable only to eliminate grosser inhumanity. They are not moved by any deep-running concern to seek to know the principle institution in the mind of God and obey Him.

Note that these Jews reveal their settled conviction that Dt. 24:1ff as well as Gen. 2:24 and 1:27 are of Mosaic authorship. Even if they ignore the weight and proper understanding of these texts, they do not debate the authorship with Him.

19:8 **Moses for your hardness of heart suffered you to put away your wives.** Since they had mistaken a situation concession for the original, divine standard, He must correct them by reminding them that they had rightly termed it a concession earlier. (Mk. 10:4) They had made the exegetical mistake of assuming that Moses' legislation commanded divorce. Moses did not order divorce as a right solution to anything. He ordered only one thing in Dt. 24:1ff: that in case a divorce had already taken place, reunion with the divorced wife is forbidden if she had married another man in the meantime. The portion cited by the Pharisees regarding the divorce certificate (Mt. 19:7) is not a law at all. (To appreciate this it is necessary to notice carefully all the "ifs" and "whens" in Dt. 24:1-4. They all

serve to describe the kind of situation in which the prohibition in verse 4 is valid. The only real precept in that entire text is found in verse 4.) Dt. 24:1-3 is but the description of a situation assumed as customary and founded upon a tradition which left it completely in the hands of the husband to initiate a divorce. In such a situation Moses could not entirely abolish the tradition without requiring by law the kind of regeneration in husbands that such new marriage laws would actually require. But even so, a correct exegesis of Dt. 24:1-4 would show that Moses actually discouraged an easy divorce, because he clearly points out the negative implications involved. Jesus' peculiar wording rumbles with judgment: **For YOUR hardness of heart Moses permitted YOU to put away YOUR wives.** Not only does He recognize that His questioners are Jews and so under the Mosaic system, but He intentionally underlines their spiritual kinship to the hard-hearted, unconverted, inhumane men back in Moses' time who retained their selfish grip on the total disposition of a marriage, claiming the right to dispose of wives who were no longer pleasing. So saying, He declared, in effect, Hillel to be exegetically right and Shammai wrong, because, whatever might be the interpretation of "some indecency," Moses never tolerated unlimited divorce.

How could God, or Moses, tolerate such **hardness of heart**? On the basis of genuine compassion for the women, the true victims of that bad situation. An entire nation cannot instantly be raised from moral vileness to Christian standards merely by enacting better laws. In fact, without deep conversion of the men that would put a new spirit in them to treat their wives with respect, the permanent, monogamic marriage ideal seen at creation, if welded into iron-fisted legislation, would have tempted men to choose sexual promiscuity or other illegitimate means to avoid the bondage of permanent marriage under a rigid legal system. Or, forced by law to keep an unloved, unwanted wife, the brutal husband could abuse her with beatings, starvation, humiliations and overwork. Thus, even permitting her to be sent away with the formal protection of the divorce certificate would have been a real kindness to her. God had faced the choice of two evils with no real, immediately available third alternative except repentance and conversion, but He was already working on that too.

But from the beginning it hath not been so. From the beginning monogamy was the rule. **The beginning** was a paradise when everything functioned harmoniously according to God's original plan, where the Kingdom of God was absolute. Now, Jesus' disciples have

voluntarily surrendered to God's rule. This is why the only rule for them must be the plan God indicated in the creation of men before sin marred the picture. Since divorce expresses the discord, rebellion and failure that come from rejecting God's Lordship over marriage, there can be no place for divorce in the Kingdom of God. In fact, it was a Cainite who began to pollute the race with the multiple marriages that divorce seems to legitimize. (Cf. Gen. 4:19)

If the validity and importance of a tradition is judged by its antiquity and origin, then Jesus has just beat the Pharisees hands down at their own game. If it be admitted that when treating divorce Moses only acceded to custom, then the Jews could claim only a tradition incorporated in the Mosaic Law, but had no authority whereby they could document this custom as much older or authoritative than that, and they certainly could not produce any divine authority for it. But Jesus, on the other hand, could not only cite a view of the human family that was as old as creation, but could point to one that enjoyed the authority of God Himself! This latter argument apparently silenced the Pharisees, because not only do they fade away, but Mark specifically affirms (Mk. 10:10) that the remainder of this conversation occurred in the house where His disciples quizzed Him further on the question. Matthew did not consider this break in the conversation important for his purpose, so omitted it.

3. "Any divorce for any reason other than unchastity encourages adultery through marriage of divorced persons." (19:9)

19:9 **And I say unto you.** This teaching is directed, not to the Pharisees who have apparently retreated in frustration, but to the disciples who, "in the house . . . asked him again about this matter." (Mk. 10:10) **I say unto you.** The time has arrived for the Son of God, with His power to convert hard hearts, to bring an end to the nefarious tradition upon which the imperfect concession in the Mosaic system was based. Jesus can create the situation where God's original ideal for marriage is a working reality. Whereinsofar men continue to insist on divorcing for any other reason than that indicated by the Lord of marriage, they usurp His divine prerogatives. Only the Gospel, not ideal divorce legislation, can bring about the ideal God had in mind at the creation.

Whosoever shall put away his wife . . . and shall marry another, committeth adultery. See notes on 5:27-32. Although Jesus' words deal specifically with the case of the man who divorces with the purpose of remarrying, the spirit of His thinking condemns also that

heartless individual who divorces his wife with no intention whatever of remarrying. He is condemned because of what the divorce does to the wife. (Cf. Mal. 2:13-16)

Except for fornication is the only concession Jesus admits to His hard line on divorce. So saying, Jesus showed Shammai to have been morally closer to the truth and Hillel morally mistaken. But what reason validates this exception? By nature, **fornication**, or adultery, destroys the monogamic family life in the sense that, by that act, the guilty person separates what God has joined and takes another mate into the family relation. This is why marital unfaithfulness constitutes an assault upon the monogamic marital union: it is *de facto* polygamy. Were there absolutely no divorce permitted, the innocent married partner would thus be forced to live in a polygamous situation.

But the man who divorces a faithful wife, however imperfect she may be on other counts, and compounds his guilt by remarriage, thus slamming the door to reconciliation, is an adulterer. This is because marriage creates a unity divisible only by death. (Ro. 7:2, 3; 1 Co. 7:39) Thus, any divorce before death would not be recognized by God, and remarriage under these circumstances must be judged adultery, because this *de facto* bigamy violates God's monogamic ideal in Gen. 1:27 and 2:24. (Heb. 13:4) Under these circumstances even rabbinic law would have condemned such a union. (Edersheim, *Life*, II, 335) Marriage to another's divorced mate is adultery, because they are still married, notwithstanding the "divorce" granted by the laws of their society. Therefore, the society that legalizes divorce for any other reason than the only one that severs the monogamic union, is merely becoming accomplice to consecutive, if not contemporaneous, polygamy. On what grounds, then, can it be asserted that "divorce *can* be the sign of repentance of two human beings who recognize their guilt of having failed to make use of the gift of God to live according to His will, and *can* in this case free them for another manifestation of divine mercy"? (Edward Schweizer quoted with approval by González-Ruiz, *Marco*, 177) But the gift of God is not the supposed freedom to think otherwise than Jesus, but REPENTANCE of all that made that marriage fail! The guilt of marital failure is never absolved by superimposing upon it the additional guilt of a sinful divorce!

However, should the sin of *fornication* be the cause of a given divorce, then Jesus' rule would read: "Whoever divorces his wife due to her unfaithfulness and shall marry another, does not commit

adultery." This is because, when the only exception that Jesus admits, is the case, then the condemnation attached to divorce for all other excuses, is absent. The guilty party destroyed the marriage unity by fornication. No longer married, the divorced innocent party is therefore a proper candidate to marry another unmarried person. Although God recognizes divorce in no other case, for Him divorce is real in this one. And if divorce is real at this point, there is no marriage between the couple involved, hence the innocent husband or wife would be free to remarry without committing adultery by so doing.

D. THE DISCIPLES' STUNNED OBJECTION:
 "BETTER NEVER TO MARRY THEN!" (19:10)

19:10 **The disciples say unto him, If the case of the man is so with his wife, it is not expedient to marry.** They reason that if marriage is indissoluble, then a life-long marriage failure would be an intolerable prison sentence and therefore ought not to be begun in the first place. Two negative observations grow out of this:

1. Some commentators believe that Jesus could not have pronounced the unchastity exception to His no-divorce rule, since Mark does not record it, hence the reader of Mark would never know about such an exception, and thus the disciples' reaction here is far more understandable if Matthew be blamed for having invented it. To this it must be replied:
 - a. Neither Mark nor Luke needed to record the exception, since Jesus' well-known teaching with the exception included (as documented by Matthew) was already sufficiently well-known. (Mt. 5:32: how often had Jesus repeated this in popular preaching?)
 - b. Further, for the disciples, the problem is not whether there could be any unchastity exception or not, because the logic of Jesus had already established one single, life-long, monogamous marriage as the standard, which, if taken to its proper conclusion, must recognize that adultery is in itself destructive of that relation. Thus, even without Matthew's record, they could have arrived at the exception made due to unfaithfulness. And, if we may judge from the mood evident in every position represented in both Judaism and especially in the NT, every Jew

would have so readily admitted fornication as a suitable ground for divorce that it needed not to have been stated by any of the Synoptics. However, Jesus deemed it essential, so He said, and Matthew documented it.

- c. What shocks the disciples is not the presence or absence of any exceptions as serious as fornication. Rather, their reaction here registers their shock that absolutely all other motives for divorce, some of which they would have personally accepted as justifiable, are deliberately swept aside by Christ.
2. Others cannot believe that the disciples, so long in Jesus' fellowship, could be capable of such moral laxness: "They would not hold that what even the Jews of the stricter school of Shammai maintained respecting the marriage-tie was an intolerable obligation." (Plummer, *Matthew*, 260) From this conclusion it is argued that Jesus could not have given the "adultery exception" (19:9), since the disciples' reaction is explicable only on the assumption that He forbade all divorce, even in the case of the wife's unfaithfulness. This distortion of the picture is corrected by the following considerations:
 - a. It is based on the false assumption that the disciples **COULD NOT** have held so low a view of marriage after so long a discipleship under Jesus. This assumption is groundless, because they proved again and again that they did not share the Lord's mentality on many subjects, and frankly told Him so, even though they had listened personally to His instruction:
 - (1) They signally failed to understand Mt. 18:1-14 by hindering others' bringing little children to Jesus. (19:13-15)
 - (2) They shamefully failed to grasp Mt. 18:1-14 by continuing to ask for positions of personal prestige in Jesus' hierarchy. (20:20-28)
 - (3) They miserably failed to understand Mt. 18:6-9 by being shocked that anyone would miss the Kingdom of God simply by refusing to eliminate his own stumbling blocks. (19:25)
 - (4) They were in danger of misunderstanding that one's standing before God is not a question of religious status or strict legal accounting, but a gift of undeserved favor. (18:23-35; 19:29—20:16)
 - b. The disciples' exclamation is perfectly understandable on quite other grounds. They could imagine the life-long human tragedies that mar the joy of marriages, that moderns put forward as excuses for divorces on terms unadmitted by the Lord. It seemed

to them that Jesus was taking no account of clashing temperaments, in-law troubles, conflicting habits and religious differences. They saw clearly the suffering on both sides of such a union that must last until death. What they did not see, of course, was that repentance and reconciliation and regeneration, not divorce and division, are the answer to this suffering.

In other words, the disciples were floating on this theologico-sociological sea somewhere between Hillel and Shammai. So, the attacking Pharisees had correctly predicted the trouble they could cause for Jesus when luring Him into debate on this subject, because even His closer understudies leap to this extreme conclusion: **It is not expedient to marry.**

So saying, the disciples gave voice to that same obtuse, moral mentality that unhappily illustrated the hardness of heart and vindicated the rightness of the Mosaic legislation. And if THEY think this way, how much more so would anyone else do so who is less willing to seek God's ideal?! Their deduction, however, is but a calculating, selfish view of marriage. It seeks only what profit will accrue to the individual, not what this splendid opportunity affords us to bless our husband or wife, our future family, our society and the Church. The disciples were voicing the typically diabolical demand: "What am I going to get out of marriage?," not the Christian problem: "What can I bring to marriage that would make it a paradise on earth for my mate?" They just do not yet see that the self-giving Kingdom ethic, which motivated Jesus (20:28) and must motivate every citizen of the Kingdom (18:1-14), has ample ramifications that reach into every aspect of life. Marriage is affected by it too. (Cf. Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Pt. 3:1-7) On the spur of the moment they can not envision a life-long, imperfect marriage being made perfect with the passage of the years. This leads us to see, with Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 227f), that Jesus' teaching about marriage means that

. . . only the Christian can accept the Christian ethic. Only the man who has the continual help of Jesus Christ and the continual guidance of the Holy Spirit can build up the personal relationship which the ideal marriage demands . . . The Christian ideal of marriage involves the prerequisite that the partners of marriage are Christian . . . So we have to face the fact that Christian marriage is only possible for Christians.

The Apostles' Jewish reaction, **it is not expedient to marry**, is based

on Jesus' statement of **the case of the man . . . with his wife**, and so differs radically in orientation from the Corinthians' position: "It is well for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Co. 7:1). It is nevertheless interesting to notice that the conclusion of both the Jewish disciples and of the Greek Corinthians, that normal physical marriage is or would be wrong or at best problematic, is itself wrong-headed. This is because it ignores our proper human nature and our "temptations to immorality" (1 Co. 7:2). It fails to see that any no-marriage rule takes no account of normal people, and is valid only for physical eunuchs and those with God's gift of the single life. (Mt. 19:11f; 1 Co. 7:7, 8) While attempting to avoid possible failure or spiritual undoing in marriage, this ignoring one's own humanness forgets that the option of celibacy is not trouble-free either.

E. JESUS' REACTION: "THE SINGLE LIFE IS AN EXCEPTIONAL GIFT, NOT THE RULE." (19:11, 12)

19:11 **But he said unto them, Not all men can receive this saying, but they to whom it is given.** What is **this saying** (*tòn lógon [toûton]*): the deduction made by the disciples (19:10) or the preceding exposition of Jesus (19:4-9)?

1. It refers to Jesus' own doctrine.

- a. No significant weight can be placed on the demonstrative pronoun, "**This saying**" (*tòn lógon [toûton]*) as pointing to the nearer context, because it is not absolutely certain that Matthew wrote it, as Metzger (*Textual Commentary*, 48f) notes:

On the one hand, since the general tendency of scribes is to make the text more explicit, e.g. by adding the demonstrative pronoun, the shorter reading supported by B, f1 and several early versions, has a certain presumption in its favor. On the other hand, however, the ambiguity of the reference of *toûton* in the context . . . may have prompted some scribes to delete the word. In order to reflect the balance of possibilities, the Committee decided to retain the word, enclosed within square brackets . . .

- b. It is as if Jesus were saying, "Not everyone has the godly concern for their mate that is required to receive (accept, comprehend) my doctrine of permanent marriage and rigidly limited

divorce. Only those who accept me as revealer of God can understand it, because such a revelation is comprehensible only to those who have their eyes open to the will of God anyway. (Cf. Mt. 11:25f; 13:11) To my disciples **it is given** to understand, but to those uninterested in doing things God's way, it is not given. Accordingly, Jesus' concluding exhortation (19:12d) would mean, "Let him who by his discipleship is able to comprehend my doctrine, do so!"

2. It refers to the saying of the disciples: "It is not good to marry."
 - a. If a choice must be made, this is the better interpretation, because Jesus' logic is tightly connected with the proof He adduces for His present affirmation. (See on 19:12.) To ignore this connection leaves one at sea to interpret it.
 - b. Jesus is not necessarily scolding the disciples for their extreme position. Rather, He shows them those to whom their statement rightly applies. (19:12) They are not totally mistaken, for there really are some who should rightly decide: "It is not good to marry." In fact, **Not all can** implies "Some can." Jesus warns that only disaster can result from making such a universal rule as the disciples propose, because men cannot be bound by rules never intended for them, any more than they can or will be governed by laws that require them to be what they cannot. The result would be only the destruction of the very principle the rule-makers hoped to express in their rule.
 - c. Celibacy for everyone means increased temptation for all those who are not gifted with the ability to abstain from a fully sexual relationship. (1 Co. 7:2, 5; 1 Ti. 5:11)

The key to the Lord's meaning is the expression **they to whom it is given**. The Giver is God who gives men the ability to marry or live the single life acceptably. (1 Co. 7:7; 1 Ti. 4:3-5; Gen. 1:27-31; 2:24)

1. Hence, the Apostles' reaction that, whatever the reason, marriage is unacceptable, is itself unacceptable, because God gives the grace to be blessed in marriage to many people. In fact, marriage is the norm, not the exception. (Gen. 2:18) The disciples' expedient (19:10) would only be valid for those exceptional individuals to whom God gives the grace to live well the single life. (1 Co. 7:7f) However, He apparently does not give this grace to many. (Cf. 1 Ti. 5:11-14; 1 Co. 7:36-38)
2. In the following verse (19:12) Jesus will indicate only three classes for whom the disciples' exceptional expedient of not marrying

would actually make sense. For the rest, however, His rule on marriage is the standard, because properly directed sexual expression is the norm and that on which the continuation of the race is based. (Gen. 1:27f; 1 Co. 7:2-5, 9; Heb. 13:4)

3. God gives the grace for a permanent, happy marriage by helping people to be firmly resolute about fulfilling their marriage promises, by helping them to be graciously unselfish, to be generously ready to make sacrifices out of love for their mate, to discover true happiness in sharing one's self, and by giving them the experience of a unity of mind that, because based on a valid principle, really affects their everyday life.

Although some doubt this evaluation of 1 Co. 7:7 on the thinking that Paul sees only celibacy as a definite charisma from God, it should be remembered that the last phrase of that text (*ho mèn hoútos, ho dè hoútos*) leaves the door open for marriage as a possible charisma from God: "Each has his own special gift (*chárisma*) from God, one of one kind and one of another."

For Jesus, there can be no condemnation for those who cannot accept the disciples' condemnation of marriage, because, according to the Lord's standard, these would be in the majority. (19:4-6) For Him, there is absolutely no opposition between the single life and marriage, because the ability to marry well or live the single life well, is a gift from God, hence there can be no suspicion that celibacy should be thought of as a choice superior to matrimony, because the Lord the Giver does not so propose it. Rather, if there is any preference shown, His citation on Gen. 1:27 and 2:24 would rate marriage as the norm to which the single life forms the exception. (See also Gen. 2:18.)

Not all men can receive this saying, but they to whom it is given. If we think of Paul's handling of the celibacy question in 1 Co. 7 as normative for our understanding of Jesus' words here, then it is important to understand what Paul indicated as clues whereby people may decide whether they have the charisma of celibacy or not. Note his observations:

If they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion. (1 Co. 7:9) . . . If any one thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. But whoever is firmly

established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. (1 Co. 7:36, 37)

From these expressions it could be concluded that the possession of the gift of the single life is closely related to, if not strictly to be identified with, the power and demands of one's own sexuality. That is, if sexual self-control and the celibacy determination is relatively easy, one has the gift. But if not, one does not possess it. In no case is there any blame attached to not possessing it any more than there is any special merit attached to possessing it. Paul argues in 1 Co. 7 that sexual asceticism must be based on good theology and practical considerations, and that anything that ignored either must be corrected, and that a fully sexual marriage was recommended for anyone that had not received from God the charisma of celibacy. (1 Co. 7:2, 5, 8, 36)

It is also imperative that Paul's reasons for the advantage of celibacy be rightly understood. He never argues that celibacy is a state theologically superior to matrimony. His arguments for his preference for the single life proceed along pragmatic lines, but it is never ordered for anyone. (1 Co. 7:7f, 25, 32, 40)

1. Sexual asceticism within marriage attempts to exalt a sexual contradiction, since it ignores one's own proper sexuality. (1 Co. 7:2-6) Mutual concern and proper self-knowledge demand limitations to any sexual abstinence within marriage. But this mutual concern does not permit undivided devotion to the Lord. (1 Co. 7:32-35)
2. Celibacy has the advantage over marriage "in view of the impending distress" (1 Co. 7:26) when conditions for Christians would become so bad that, even for married people, practical or virtual celibacy could well become the condition or state in which they must live. (1 Co. 7:29)
3. Celibacy permits "undivided devotion to the Lord" (1 Co. 7:35) which married life tends to compromise. (1 Co. 7:32-34)
4. The single life is not a question of spiritual or theological superiority, but of pragmatic advantage over marriage. (1 Co. 7:38) There is no sin in marriage where it is especially appropriate. (1 Co. 7:36, 38a) There is no question that marriage is good; rather, under the stated circumstances, the single life is better.
5. Although quite "free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord," the Christian widow would, in Paul's judgment, be

- “happier” in her unmarried state. (1 Co. 7:39, 40) “Happier” does not mean more highly spiritual.
6. It should also be noticed in this connection that Paul claimed his right “to be accompanied by a Christian wife (*adelfèn gunaika*) as the other Apostles and brothers of the Lord and Cephas.” (1 Co. 9:5) Genuine Christianity does not find its validation in sexual asceticism exemplified in Paul, because he himself cited other equally authoritative examples to undermine such a conclusion.

To remain unmarried for the sake of freedom to work in the service of God and humanity, unencumbered by family cares and responsibilities, is one thing, while to refuse marriage out of suspicion that there is something contaminating or impure about marriage is quite another. (Marshal, *Challenge of New Testament Ethics*, 176)

19:12 **For:** what follows is intended to furnish a rationale for Jesus’ previous statement that not everyone can accept the Apostles’ extreme deduction that marriage is unprofitable. The single life to which the Apostles’ conclusion points, says Jesus, is like that of the eunuch, of which He notes three types:

1. **eunuchs that were so born from their mother’s womb**, i.e. those born with defective genitals and would not be capable of consummating a fully sexual marriage.
2. **eunuchs that were made eunuchs by men**, i.e. those who are castrated face the same problem. (Cf. 2 Kg. 20:18 = Isa. 39:7; Isa. 56:3-5; the two Ethiopian eunuchs; Jer. 38:7ff; Ac. 8:27ff)
3. **and there are eunuchs, that made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake**. These are those normal people who, while sexually perfectly capable of consummating marriage, have the gift to live the single life happily in special service to God, and choose to do so. Paul had the gift and used it for more effective service in the Kingdom by leaving himself free to carry on a wide-ranging evangelistic ministry. (See 1 Co. 7:7f, 32-35; 9:5) This principle describes and justifies the celibacy of John the Baptist and of Jesus Himself. Others, because of severe hardship and persecutions, might voluntarily decide not to marry. (1 Co. 7:25-35, 37f)

There are really only two options whereby people **make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven:**

1. Literal self-emasculatation, while actually performed by a few misguided souls (cf. Origen, according to Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical*

History, Bk. VI, chap. 8), violates the principles laid down by Paul against the uselessness of such rigor. (Col. 2:20-23; see notes on 5:29, 30) For the Christian, then, this is not a live option.

2. Those who are unmarried may choose not to marry, in order to be more effective in their service for the Kingdom. However, the motivation and one's moral capacity is important: Jesus is not interested in a mere abstinence from marriage or a superficial continence. He is rather discussing the person whose intellect and desires are so actively engrossed in the advancement of the Kingdom that he has no desire or impelling reason for marrying. This is non-ascetic celibacy for the sake of one's work. Again, any consideration of the single life for its own sake is also to be rejected, because the only question important to the Lord is whether His disciples are living lives that reflect their dedication to God, i.e. **for the kingdom of heaven**. If their celibacy does not actually promote this, He is not interested.
3. Those who are married, but whose unbelieving partner refuses to live with a Christian, when forced to let the unbeliever depart, find themselves, for the sake of Christ, in the situation of a virtual **eunuch for the kingdom of heaven**. They are not obligated ("bound") to maintain a marriage for sake of the marriage to the detriment and disadvantage of their confession of Christ and their belonging to Him. (1 Co. 7:12-16) So, in principle, Jesus' expression, **eunuchs for the Kingdom**, does leave the door open for separation from an unbelieving spouse, but, even so, it is not a divorce initiated by the Christian in order to remarry (as in 19:9 or Mk. 10:11f), but a bowing to the choice of the unbelieving spouse, in order to follow God's call to peace in the Kingdom. (1 Co. 7:15c; Ro. 14:17) It is the choice to remain unmarried for Christ's sake, hence a **eunuch for the Kingdom's sake**. In a sense, this forced dissolution of a marriage is forced upon the believer. It is a condition over which he has no control, much like becoming a physical eunuch is beyond the decision of the person involved.

There are two senses in which every Christian must consider himself a **eunuch for the Kingdom**, even if he does not possess that gift of celibacy that expresses itself in a personal choice not to marry:

1. The Lord has declared that we, His disciples, must be willing, should the situation arise that requires it, to surrender everything we possess, even life itself, for His sake. (Mt. 10:37-39; 16:24-27; 18:6-9; 19:29; Lk. 14:26-33) This may include one's wife. (Lk. 18:29)

Even though Matthew does not include "or wife" in 19:19, as Luke does in Lk. 18:29, it is mistaken to believe that he saw some contradiction between Jesus' strong, hard-line stand on the permanence of marriage (19:3-12) and the loss of one's wife for Jesus' sake (19:29), and that for ascetic considerations, deliberately sidestepped the issue by omitting it.

So the call to great sacrifice of every relationship for Christ's sake, even marriage if need be, may reduce one to the level of a virtual eunuch, even though already married. (See above at 19:11.)

Was this kind of sacrifice temporarily required of Moses? He started out from Midian to begin his mission in Egypt, taking his Midianite wife and sons with him. But after the crisis over the son's circumcision at which time Moses' life was endangered and his wife reacted negatively (?), rather than take her and the boys with him to Egypt, Moses sent them back to Jethro, while he pressed on toward his great mission. Did Zipporah's attitude have anything to do with his decision? At least, it was not until his return to Sinai with the freed people that he was able to embrace them once again. (Cf. Ex. 4:18-29; 18:1-6)

2. There is another sense in which every Christian must consider himself **a eunuch for the Kingdom of God**. Every Christian must, for Christ's sake, treat everyone of the opposite sex, who is not his or her mate, as if he or she could not consummate physical sexual relations with them because of a physical defect. The real hindrance is of course not physical but moral. (See notes on 5:27-30)

These are important, however secondary, senses and do not nullify the truth that some have the gift to live the single life in God's Kingdom and for His service.

He that is able to receive it, let him receive it. (*ho dunámenos choreîn, choreîto*) The main problem of interpretation here is the decision whether Jesus is giving a command or making a concession, since the Greek imperative may be understood either way. Blass-Debrunner (§§387, 384) note:

The imperative in the NT keeps for the most part within the same limits as in classical usage. As in the latter it is by no means confined to commands, but also expresses a request or a concession

. . . In the latter case the imperative can simply be the equivalent of a concessive clause . . . There is, however, a strong tendency to use the imperative instead of the optative, not only in requests, for which the imperative has a place in classical too, but also in imprecations which in classical take the optative.

Also, as in our case with the third person imperative (*choreíto*), the imperative can be equivalent to the hortatory subjunctive, i.e. as an exhortation. (Cf. Robertson-Davis, *Grammar*, 164, §308; 312, §407) There is practically no way of rendering the third person imperative in English, except as an exhortation: "Let him accept it!" On the basis of the foregoing, then, Jesus' exhortation is no ground for a church law that legally demands celibacy of an entire class of people (i.e. clergymen or any other group). Forced celibacy does not share Jesus' viewpoint and certainly is not commanded. Considered as an exhortation, this expression reflects the proper use of Christian liberty to marry or not as one's individual situation, gifts, opportunities, etc., permit. There can be no unanimity of application among Christians, since these factors all differ from person to person and from century to century as well as from country to country. Since the disciples had categorically excluded marriage, Jesus urges them to reconsider their rash proposal. Let them take individual differences into considerations. Four classes of people have been discussed: three classes for whom the single life is quite properly indicated, and one class—by far the largest—for whom only marriage is the solution. Now Jesus exhorts them: "Let each person decide what is best for himself."

See Special Study: "Money and Marriage: Manacles of the Mundane?" after 19:30.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. In what part of Palestine was Jesus operating when He was questioned about His position on divorce? Is it possible to pinpoint this place with precision?
2. Had Jesus ministered in this section before?
3. How does Matthew's account harmonize with that of Luke and John regarding any extended ministry of Jesus in this area? Is the period represented in chapters 19 and 20 another of Matthew's collections of events together (as he does in chapters 8 and 9),

- or is there objective evidence that the events narrated occurred in the order indicated by Matthew?
4. Explain the significance of the peculiar question placed before Jesus by the Pharisees. What was there about the divorce issue that served the critic's purpose to trap Him?
 5. List the points Jesus made in His reply.
 6. What Bible texts did Jesus quote to the Pharisees in support of His argument? Explain how Jesus could affirm that these texts represent the words of God.
 7. What did "hardness of heart" have to do with divorce? How would "hardness of heart" require a bad law on divorce?
 8. What exception did Jesus make to His universal prohibition of divorce? In what does this exception consist? Explain why only this exception is justifiable.
 9. How much of Jesus' discourse on marriage, divorce and the single life was publicly presented to the Pharisees and how much was stated privately to His disciples? How do you know?
 10. What was the disciples' objection and what provoked it? That is, what were they objecting to, AND what in them caused them to do so?
 11. What is a "eunuch" and why could Jesus use such a person as an illustrative basis for His discussion?
 12. Who or what is a person who has "made himself a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven"?
 13. What is the major lesson on marriage and the single life that Jesus taught at the conclusion of this section?
 14. List the texts in Matthew 18 that find practical application in this section and show their connection.

Section 48

JESUS BLESSES THE LITTLE CHILDREN

(Parallels: Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17)

TEXT: 19:13-15

- 13 Then were there brought to him little children, that he should lay his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.
14 But Jesus said, Suffer the little children, and forbid them not,