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

Jesus' Teachings on Marriage

Jesus stressed the permanent nature of the marriage relationship for those who choose to enter it.

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The devil hates a Christian home. Therefore he has the institutions of marriage and the home under severe attack because they are so important in a God-fearing society.

Divorce has become a major problem today. Almost 50 percent of the marriages contracted in the United States end in divorce. What can be done to heal that festering sore in our society? There is only one thing that can be done: return to the divine ideal of marriage and the home.

To know and follow God's plan for marriage will remove the problem and bring blessing back into the home. There can be no improvement over God's plan. We are fortunate that Jesus discussed the question of divorce and gave us some insights which we can apply today.

Watch in the following comments on Matthew 19:3-13 for the central truth of the lesson: "Jesus stressed the permanent nature of the marriage relationship for those who choose to enter it."

I. MAN'S PROBLEM WITH MARRIAGE (Matthew 19:3)

"Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" That question, presented to Jesus by some Pharisees who opposed Him, opened the door to the subject of marriage and divorce in God's original intention and ideal plan.

The key to the question was whether or not a man could divorce his wife *"for every cause."* The question was based on differences of interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 where divorce was permitted if a man's wife *"find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her."* There was some question on what *"uncleanness"* was sufficient ground for a divorce.

Rabbi Shammai and his followers insisted that reference was to adultery and nothing else. Rabbi Hillel and liberal interpreters said it referred to anything which displeased the husband. The *Mishna* reads, "The following women may be divorced: She who violates the Law of Moses, i.e., causes her husband to eat food which has not been tithed She who vows, but does not keep her vows She who goes out on the street with her hair loose, or spins in the street, or converses (flirts) with another man, or is a noisy woman. What is a noisy woman? It is one who speaks in her own house so loud that the neighbors may hear her" (Article on "Divorce," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume II*, page 864).

By asking if a man could divorce his wife for *"every cause,"* the request was that those causes for divorce be named if *"every cause"* was not sufficient. Jesus named one permission for divorce. Why was man having a problem with marriage? Jesus said it was *"because of the hardness of your hearts"* (Matthew 19:8). Sin causes all kinds of problems, even breaking up homes.

II. GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGE (Matthew 19:4~6)

A. Humans were created male and female for the purpose of union in marriage (verses 4, 5). Jesus went back to the original account of creation to explain God's purpose in marriage. He pointed out that God made the first two humans as male and female with marriage in mind (Genesis 2:18-25).

One of God's first commands to them was, *"Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it"* (Genesis 1:28). That was why God made the female to match the male and brought them together, confirming their permanent union: *"and they shall be one flesh"* (Genesis 2:24). Marriage is not an arrangement by man; it is an institution approved of God.

B. God designed marriage to involve both a separation (*"a man [shall] leave father and mother"*) **and a union** (*"and shall cleave to his wife"*) **not to be dissolved** (*"and they twain shall be one flesh"*). See the words of Jesus in Matthew 19:5. The marriage union is exclusive. It

excludes parents, other lovers, and other married partners. It is the union of one man and one woman as one flesh for life.

C. God intended that a permanent relationship be established in marriage (verse 6). Here is how Jesus said it: *"Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."* The principle could not be stated more plainly than that. Man must not separate by divorce what God has joined together in marriage.

God never intended that man should break apart what He had joined together in the marriage bond. Those who divorce are not following through on God's plan for marriage. When two become one, divorce is the amputation of a part of oneself by separation from the partner in marriage. It leaves a person incomplete, blemished, and scarred for life. It is one of the most solemn decisions one could make in this world.

Divorce does not solve problems; it simply exchanges one set of problems for another. Ask the person who has been through that tragic experience.

III. MOSES' PERMISSION OF DIVORCE (Matthew 19:7-9)

Someone asked Jesus, *"Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?"* That looks back to the first provision of divorce written in the law of God, recorded in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. (The interested reader should stop at this point and read that text.) It is enlightening to relate Matthew 19:7-9 to Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

A. Divorce was permitted by the law of Moses. Jesus said, *"Moses . . . suffered you to put away your wives"* (Matthew 19:8). He recognized that the permission for divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1 ff.) was a part of the Mosaic legislation. Whatever the reason; Moses permitted divorce. He even set a requirement for a written "bill of divorcement" which a man must give to the wife whom he was sending out of his house. There is no denying that that is written in the law by divine inspiration.

B. Divorce was permitted because of human sin. Why was divorce permitted? *"Because of the hardness of your hearts"* was the explanation Jesus gave (verse 8). Men were unteachable, morally perverse, and unwilling to follow God's intention. Does that mean God changed His law to accommodate men who rejected His law? Not at all. He did not add that provision to the law to permit men to sin, but to protect the innocent party in the affair. What a tragedy that men would so sin as to reject the law of the God who created them.

C. Divorce was permitted to protect the innocent party, not as an easy way to get out of an unpleasant marriage situation. The culture of ancient times had no place for a woman to live alone. A woman must be supported by a man — father, husband, or other relative — or she must be a slave or a prostitute. A woman married to one Hebrew could not be married to another, upon the penalty of death. What was a woman to do when she was forced out of her home? If she had no father or male relative to take her in, she was in serious trouble. The bill of divorcement was given to protect her.

D. Divorce was permitted to allow for a second marriage. *"She may go and be another man's wife"* (Deuteronomy 24:2). She would not be reduced to slavery or prostitution. She could be honored as the wife of a man. There is no basis in exegesis to have any other interpretation than that to the passage. A second marriage was permitted to a woman in order to protect her in the kind of society in which she lived.

E. Divorce was permitted even though it was not God's ideal in the original intention of marriage. Jesus said, *"From the beginning it was not so"* (Matthew 19:8). That means, "It was not intended that way at the beginning," or "It was not like that when all began." Divorce is, at best, a perversion of God's ideal design for marriage.

F. Divorce is permitted by Jesus in the case of fornication. To divorce and marry another, *"except it be for fornication,"* is to commit adultery (Matthew 19:9). *"Fornication"* may mean sexual immorality with an unmarried person (with adultery involving a married person), but most commonly it is used in Holy Scripture to mean unfaithfulness to one's sexual vows or unchastity in the moral area. Sexual immorality is a basis for divorce, according to the words of Jesus.

IV. MAN'S INABILITY IN MARRIAGE (Matthew 19:10-12)

The disciples were amazed at so strict an interpretation of the divorce issue. They said, *"If that is the way it is between a man and woman, it is better not to get married."*

Jesus admitted that not every person would (or could) receive such teaching and live up to it. But there are some who can because they have the grace to do it.

There need be no surprise if unsaved people exchange partners like they trade automobiles. They do not live by the law of God. They are in rebellion against God because of their sin. But that is no excuse for the people of God

to live like them. For the sake of the kingdom of God, the Christian should settle the issue of faithfulness in marriage as God has ordained.

There are some people who should never marry at all. They are unfitted because of physical problems of whatever sort. One does not have to be married to be happy, if he is in the will of God in an unmarried state.

Other people have refrained from marriage because their work in the kingdom of God is not such that responsibilities of a home and children would make marriage appropriate.

Blessed is the person who is in the will of God in his married or unmarried state.

V. CHILDREN'S PLACE IN MARRIAGE (Matthew 19:13-15)

Following the discussion of marriage and divorce, some brought little children for Jesus to touch and pray for them. The disciples thought the Lord was too busy to be bothered with the little ones. They rebuke those who brought the children. But the disciples did not know the mind of their Lord. He told them, *"Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them. for it is to the childlike that the kingdom of heaven belongs."* Here some truths to be found in that incident.

A. Parents do well to bring their children to Jesus. It is appropriate for a new-born child to be dedicated to the Lord by the father and mother.

B. Some will object to the children coming to Jesus. Some will think the child is too young to understand; therefore, bringing him to Jesus is only a hindrance to more important matters.

C. Jesus receives every child who is brought to Him. He deals with them tenderly, for He values them highly.

D. Jesus blesses the children who are brought to Him. Who could want a more precious experience for his son or daughter than for the blessing of the Lord to be upon him?

That is a summary of the teachings of Jesus concerning marriage and divorce. It is very important that those teachings be understood and obeyed in today's society.

As go the homes so go the churches, schools, and the nation. The Christian home is the last citadel which Satan must destroy to overthrow our nation, a nation which is able in finances, personnel, and technology to get the gospel to the whole world in one generation.

We must maintain our Christian homes for the good of our nation and for the glory of God. Christian, be on guard!

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the devil oppose the Christian home?
2. How is divorce such a threat today?
3. Why did Jesus discuss the divorce issue?
4. How is Deuteronomy 24:1-4 related to Matthew 19:7-9?
5. What is God's plan for marriage?
6. How does Hebrews 13:4 relate to the study?
7. Why was divorce written into the law of Moses?
8. What about a second marriage after a divorce?
9. Why should some people never marry?
10. How can you guard your home against the devil?