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Sermon Notes

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## **Jesus Teaches on Marriage and Divorce, Part 2**

### **Matthew 19:1-12**

#### I. Review: The Pharisees Ask a Treacherous Question

##### A. The Treacherous Question

***Matthew 19:3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"***

1. they were not looking for information... they just HATED Jesus and wanted to have him killed
2. backdrop to their question: a long-standing debate among Jewish rabbis on the issue of divorce
  - a. every Jew believed a Jewish man had the right to divorce his wife based on the Law of Moses, Deuteronomy 24: it says a man who finds something “indecent” about his wife can write her a certificate of divorce... but if she marries another man, she can never return to her first husband
  - b. the strict school of the rabbi Shammai felt that the “indecent thing” the first husband found had to be adultery
  - c. the more lenient school of Hillel interpreted it more widely and said it referred to anything offensive to the husband... even spoiling the husband’s dinner
  - d. the Pharisees tended to follow Hillel and allow divorce “for any and every reason”

#### II. The Timeless Answer of Jesus

***Matthew 19:4-6 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' <sup>5</sup> and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."***

A timeless answer from Jesus... its truths are still binding on us today, no matter how modern or postmodern we may think we are

He first lays four immovable foundation stones on which He bases His answer... then He gives His ruling

#### A. Foundation #1: The Sufficiency of Scripture

1. "Haven't you read..."
  - a. Jesus begins this dispute by setting the ground rules
  - b. The answer will be found only by a right reading of Scripture
  - c. The Scripture is SUFFICIENT to answer the questions of marriage and divorce

#### What Scripture says, God says

#### B. Foundation #2: God's Original Intent

1. Haven't you read that **at the beginning**...
2. Jesus carries our minds back to God's original intention
3. What God did with Adam and Eve was intended to be a pattern for EVERY MARRIAGE THAT FOLLOWED

*...at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh...'*

For this reason = this is a lasting principle for all time

Neither Adam nor Eve had a father or a mother... but every other man in history would have one... and their union would be the pattern for all other marriages

4. He calls God "the Creator"... and the Creator does everything for a purpose
5. He will argue that divorce was no part of God's original purpose

***Matthew 19:8 "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. BUT IT WAS NOT THIS WAY FROM THE BEGINNING."***

6. God's original purpose: one man (a male), one woman (a female), coming together in a complete physical union (one flesh) for the purpose of filling the earth with His image and His glory

***Genesis 1:27-28 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."***

7. Essential to God's purpose is procreation... the birth of children... though it is not God's only purpose in marriage, yet this is why the GENDER (male, female) is mentioned here... this completely rules out so-called homosexual marriage
8. God wanted godly offspring... and children were to be born into a covenant marriage relationship with a male (father) and a female (mother) who would train them at least in part to get ready for their own future marriages

***Matthew 19:5 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?***

C. Foundation #3: God's Action in Marriage

1. Christ says that the Creator physically prepared them for marriage by making them male and female... their physical bodies well-suited for God's purposes in marriage
2. some ascetics within the Christian church history have written against any kind of sexual involvement as if it were intrinsically evil, because it is "fleshly"
3. but that anti-flesh bias comes more from Greek philosophy than from the Bible
4. The Creator made them male and female... and then brought them together so **the two would become one flesh**
5. Jesus goes beyond that to say that **God has joined them together**

***"what God has joined together..."***

D. Foundation #4: The Two Become One Flesh

1. this union is deep and real
2. it is not merely a "piece of paper" as some people who like to live together before marriage say
3. God does something very profound, very mystical... yes it is physical, the marital bed is pure and undefiled and physical
4. But God also creates a UNITY where there was none before
5. it is so profound that Paul likens it to Christ's unity with the church

***Ephesians 5:31-32 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." <sup>32</sup> This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church.***

6. AND even more amazing, Christ's unity with the church is a picture of God the Father's unity with God the Son in the Trinity

***John 17:21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.***

E. The Timeless Answer

***Matthew 19:6 Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."***

1. Jesus' answer to the treacherous question, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" is simply, clearly **ABSOLUTELY NOT!!!!**
2. We have no right to undo what God has joined... to rip it apart, separate it, cleave it apart...
3. Four-fold foundation to Christ's timeless command
  - a. Because Scripture is God's perfect word to you
  - b. And because in Scripture, God's original intention in marriage is made plain
  - c. And because God has acted directly in marriage from the very beginning and even now, personally involved in making marriages
  - d. And because the two become physically and mystically one,
  - e. Let man NOT separate what God has joined
4. There are more questions to ask... always more and more, but let's keep this clear teaching in front of us

### III. Two More Questions and Two More Answers

A. Question #1: Why Did Moses Command Divorce?

***Matthew 19:7 Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"***

1. notice that, despite the clear answer with its four-fold foundation doesn't quiet his enemies
2. it is important for Christians in particular to allow the clear teaching of the Bible to quiet their stream of questions at some point
3. are we here to argue with Jesus or to allow Him to speak authoritatively to us, even in the most controversial issues

4. Jesus' statement was so absolute that it left even those who followed the stricter school of Rabbi Shammai wondering if Jesus would permit any divorce at all
5. the Pharisees come back with Moses' command... which their hearts had twisted somewhat
6. remember that Moses was regulating not so much divorce as he was forbidding the remarriage of a twice-divorced woman to her original husband

B. Jesus' Answer: Hardness of Heart

***Matthew 19:8-9 Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. <sup>9</sup> I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."***

1. clarification #1: Moses never COMMANDED anyone to get a divorce; he merely permitted you to divorce your wives
2. clarification #2: divorce is rooted in the hardness of heart all sinners depict... sin is always the root cause of divorce; I am not saying that there is not the "innocent party" in a divorce... there are some absolutely heart-wrenching cases in which a Christian husband or wife has been cruelly sinned against by some adulterous spouse, then struggles valiantly to save the marriage, but ends up losing that struggle
3. However, the permission Moses gave for divorce was not in God's original intention... it was **not this way from the beginning**
4. Jesus' strong pronouncement: if you divorce your wife for any reason other than sexual immorality on the part of your wife, and you marry another woman you commit adultery
5. clarification #3: divorce is sometimes permissible... there is a lawful way to get a divorce
  - a. this is the controversial "exception clause"
  - b. it is controversial because Jesus gives NO EXCEPTION in Luke and in Mark

***Mark 10:11-12 He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. <sup>12</sup> And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."***

***Luke 16:18 "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery."***

- c. however, if we accept all Scripture as God breathed, we must accept this statement as the inspired utterance of Almighty God on earth

Whenever two parallel texts say the same thing, but one gives additional information, the text without the additional information must be understood to be abridged, a shortened version, and the fuller version is the final one...

The phrase “except for *porneia*” is in Matthew, therefore it is inspired; Mark and Luke shortened Jesus’ saying for some reason

Similar situation:

***Mark 8:11-12 The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. <sup>12</sup> He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it."***

But in Matthew, there is a fuller account:

***Matthew 12:39 He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."***

The “exception” clause in Matthew must stand over against the stark statement in Mark—“No sign will be given to it.”

So, Jesus does give an exception in Matthew

- d. a man who divorces his wife FOR SEXUAL IMMORALITY does so lawfully
  - i) that is the clear force of the Greek words translated “except”
  - ii) the “except” covers ONE CASE... other cases have been ruled out by Jesus’ earlier statement “What God has joined together let man not separate”
  - iii) what is “marital unfaithfulness” or “sexual immorality” The Greek word is *porneia*, and it is broader than merely adultery... it covers any kind of sexual immorality, including fornication and adultery
  - iv) again notice that Jesus is not commanding people to get a divorce even if there is *porneia*... even in those cases, forgiveness and grace can restore a damaged marriage
  - v) but there is an exception, and I believe since Jesus Himself is dealing with remarriage (**and marries another woman**) then the lawful divorce carries with it the right to remarry

Note: Later, the apostle Paul will add another case, that of abandonment of a Christian by an unbelieving spouse, and I believe he is giving permission to that person also to a lawful divorce and subsequent remarriage. Other's disagree and say no remarriage is ever in view... I respect that view but disagree with it

Many godly Christian leaders, based on the fact that there is NO EXCEPTION listed in Mark and Luke say that divorce is NEVER permissible...

John MacArthur: "But that which is contrary to Scripture can never be either loving or spiritual. A human standard may be more lenient or more restrictive than Scripture; but it can never be better. When God's word is ignored or perverted in any area, tragedy is always the consequence. The matter of marriage and divorce standards are no exception."

### C. Question #2: Isn't It Better Not to Marry?

1. this one comes from Jesus' own disciples

***Matthew 19:10 The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."***

2. human nature, as usual, taking it TOO FAR!!!

- a. The disciples have clearly overturned the original intention of marriage, which was that it was to be a BLESSING from the hand of God
- b. God said of solitary Adam

***"It is not good for the man to be alone... I will make a helper suitable for him."***

- c. The disciples say

***"It is not good for a man to be married..."***

- d. See how deeply in love with our freedom we are
  - i) We are always looking to make the final pronouncement, to get the final word
  - ii) We want an escape route, and God does not intend to give us one
  - iii) In the Christian church, marriage is at least in part intended to serve God's greater purpose in sanctifying each partner
  - iv) Marriage gives a context for very hard issues and deep-rooted sin to float to the surface so it can be dealt with
  - v) That process is so painful, if we had an easy escape route we would readily take it

vi) So also the process of raising a family is very difficult, a daily challenge... many a man finds it too much for his natural abilities and inclinations...

vii) He is looking for an easy escape... and God will not allow him one

Illus. There is a story commonly told about Spanish Conquistador Hernan Cortez, that when he and his small force of 700 men landed in Mexico in 1519, he burned his ships so that his men would be completely committed to the difficult conquest of the Aztec Empire. Whether the story is true or not, it illustrates this principle in marriage: God is not giving your sinful flesh an easy way out... He wants you to work out your salvation with fear and trembling and also to work out your marital difficulties the same way

D. Jesus' Answer: It Depends on Your Gift

***Matthew 19:11-12 Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. <sup>12</sup> For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."***

1. The disciples were saying it's better to be single
2. Jesus accepts that, for some people it IS better to be single... He Himself is a prime example of that; so would be the Apostle Paul
3. But that it's a gift, and not everyone can ACCEPT it... the Greek word means "make room for" the concept "I'm going to be single the rest of my life"
4. He cites different cases: some are born "eunuchs" (i.e. those who will never marry)... they are born that way because of some physical or mental defect
5. Others are made that way by men: (referring perhaps to those who were forcibly made eunuchs in Gentile courts like those of Babylon and Persia)
6. Others have "made themselves eunuchs" for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven
  - a. This does not refer to some drastic act like Origen took of self-emasculation so that he wouldn't suffer from sexual temptation ever again
  - b. Rather this speaks of a voluntary renouncing of marriage for spiritual purposes
  - c. The Apostle Paul advocated this life in 1 Corinthians 7 and stated that it was his choice in 1 Corinthians 9



7. however, remember that Jesus said not everyone can accept it, but **only those to whom it has been given**
8. Paul put it in terms of GIFTS... one man will have the gift of singleness, another man the gift of a wife

***1 Corinthians 7:7 each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.***

9. so also Jesus finished that way

***Matthew 19:12 The one who can accept this should accept it.***

i.e. “the one who can accept permanent singleness for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven should do so!”

#### IV. Applications

##### A. Celebrate the Gift of Marriage

1. think often of the goodness of God in giving us this gift of marriage
2. it is Satan who wants us to think hard thoughts of marriage in many different ways
  - a. to be the philosopher ascetic who says that all fleshly things are evil, forgetting that it is God who made the flesh, and a male and a female to become one flesh
  - b. or on the other hand, to so delight in the physical sensations of the flesh that we forget the holy covenant of marriage that God established to protect it
  - c. so it is Satan that pushes young people to seize privileges that have not been given them yet because God has not yet made the two one by marriage
3. if you're married: thank God for marriage—for the wisdom and goodness of God in bringing you two together
4. if someday you will be married, thank God for that blessed state and look forward to it with holy expectations... keep yourself sexually pure in mind and body... keep yourself completely pure for that day when you will stand before God with the partner of your youth God is giving you
5. if you are a widow/widower, remember with sweetness the goodness of God in giving you the gift of marriage for as long as He did

##### B. Glorify God in Your Marriage

1. if you are married, make your marriage a delightful display of the glory of God

2. understand that Satan wants to make your marriage a battleground... perhaps no one needs to remember this verse **Our struggle is NOT against flesh and blood**... than a married person
3. Your mentality should be that God brought you together primarily for the purpose of putting Himself on display... that His attributes might shine forth; both in how you treat each other, in the way you help sanctify each other, in the way you raise the next generation for His glory... **THAT GOD MAY BE GLORIFIED**... that is the reason you exist as husband and wife
4. so often divorce is essentially selfish: “she doesn’t meet my needs” “He doesn’t understand me” “irreconcilable differences”... it can all be so selfish
5. the best remedy to selfishness in marriage is to see your marriage as having been crafted by God for His own glory and pleasure

#### C. Think of Divorce as Unthinkable

1. theologically unthinkable:
  - a. because the Trinity is eternal... no person of the Trinity is ever going to seek to get out
  - b. because salvation is eternal: God has promised to never leave us or forsake us, so He expects us to make that same promise to each other
  - c. because heaven is eternal: “and so we will be with the Lord **forever**”
  - d. for all these reasons, marriage must be permanent as defined by God
2. Practically unthinkable:
  - a. in this world of sin, the purpose of this standard that so shocked the disciples that they said “It’s better not to get married” is to protect the marriage from our sin natures... when two sinners come together to get married, their mutual sin habits will conspire to make life very challenging
  - b. if divorce is as easy as our sin natures would make it, we would be tempted to throw in the towel and not work things through
3. Therefore: don’t mention divorce in angry moments... when you are having a conflict, do not bring it up as an option; when
4. Obviously: I do not remove the exception clause Christ gave... divorce is permissible in the case of sexual immorality... but even then, there should be a deep desire at reconciliation

#### D. Case Studies

1. To those who have never been married, but would like to be someday
  - a. Respect the sanctity of marriage and maintain sexual purity
    - i) You will never regret setting too high a standard for sexual purity before marriage, but many have regretted becoming too intimate with a boyfriend or girlfriend
  - b. Wait on the Lord for the gift He will give you... remember that it is God who makes marriages
  - c. To the single young men, remember that, while God makes marriages, it is still incumbent upon the man to leave the father and mother to be united to the wife
    - i) The regular pattern in the Bible is that men find a wife, women are given away in marriage... just do a search on the phrase “given in marriage”
    - ii) This means that it is the responsibility of a young man to seek a wife... to be pursuing both the Lord in prayer for this blessing, and pursuing a godly woman to be a wife
    - iii) Learn from Scripture what kind of woman you should seek in marriage: a Christian, a godly woman, who can aid you in your life calling for Christ
  - d. To the single young women, focus your hearts entirely on Christ as sufficient for your soul, make up your mind not to settle for anything less than a strong spiritual leader who will strengthen your walk with Christ
2. To married people
  - a. Celebrate the gift of marriage... delight in it, even when things are very difficult
  - b. Follow the precepts given in Ephesians 5 for husbands and wives... I will not quote those verses now, but God has given ample counsel in His word on building a good marriage
  - c. Guard yourself very carefully from the threat of adultery... of sexual immorality
    - i) Never before in history have men been so constantly assaulted by pornographic images
    - ii) It used to be that men would have to drive to a certain place in town, maybe on the other side of the tracks to the bad side of town...

- iii) Now, with the advent of the internet and cable TV, pornographic images are readily available and assault marriages with savage force
  - iv) Husbands especially need to guard their hearts, put protection in your lives so that you do not stumble into a devastating sin pattern
  - v) Wives need to continue cheerfully to care for their husbands in the area of marital intimacy, to help them in their battle
- d. Make it the focus of your marriage to live for the glory of God: for husbands to seek to develop their wives to full maturity in Christ; for wives to strengthen the ministries of their husbands through their prayers, godly counsel, and acts of service
  - i) Understand that the ultimate purpose of your marriage is the glory of God
- e. See that in the terms of the two infinite journeys
  - i) Say” Our marriage exists so that God may be glorified in it”
  - ii) “One of the ways God can be glorified in our marriage is by each of us helping the other to grow into Christlike maturity”... so our marriage is for sanctification
  - iii) Secondly, “our marriage exists for the Great Commission... making disciples of others and helping them to grow to full maturity in Christ”... our marriage thus must be a platform for ministry for the glory of God
- f. This perspective will cut off the number one cause of divorce: selfishness
  - i) So many people seeking a divorce say “Doesn’t God want me to be happy?”
  - ii) Yes, but His eyes are on your eternal happiness in His glory... it’s not a selfish, idolatrous happiness that God wants for you
  - iii) So, He may actually NOT be willing that a husband or wife be HAPPY today, but rather that they roll up their sleeves and go to work on some especially painful aspect of their characters
  - iv) Husbands and wives should therefore be each other’s allies in the battle for sanctification: “Our struggle is NOT against flesh and blood...” no one needs to believe that more that a married couple!!
- g. Work hard on your communication

- i) Keep talking together, keep praying together
- ii) Bad communication is both a cause and a symptom of a marriage in trouble

3. To those whose marriage is in trouble

- a. As we've said, think of divorce as unthinkable
- b. Understand that times of trouble are inevitable... the security of marriage is to give a solid relational foundation for you to work out your salvation with fear and trembling
- c. Make your troubles an occasion for coming together in prayer... seeking God's help, seeking God's counsel
- d. The fact that there is no godly escape from a marriage HELPS you stand and face your problems... rather than seeking to escape them
- e. Get Godly counsel... we are seeking to establish an in-house counseling ministry here at FBC in 2009... take advantage of it!!! Ask for help... ask for prayers

4. What if there's been adultery? Do we have to get a divorce?

- a. No... as I've said, divorce is nowhere COMMANDED in Scripture, merely permitted in certain limited cases as we've discussed
- b. If adultery has occurred, it will be a tremendous trial and only the grace of God can overcome it
- c. But if the partner is willing to continue in the marriage, the victimized spouse has all the resources he/she needs to forgive (remember the 10,000 talents) and to cover the constant reminders of the sin with the blessing of Christ's blood and His grace

E. If You Are the Innocent Party

- 1. Perhaps your spouse abandoned you... perhaps he or she was unfaithful to you... perhaps you fought to save the marriage and they were determined to leave
- 2. I want you to know that God's mercy is there for you... abundantly... His grace is sufficient for you
- 3. I know that doesn't take away all the sting, but it is a sweet thing to reflect on verses like this:

***Isaiah 43:1-2 "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. <sup>2</sup> When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.***

I also stand here and say it is my conviction that, if you are the innocent party in a divorce as Jesus describes here in Matthew 19 and in Matthew 5, or as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 7, then I believe you are free to remarry

John MacArthur makes the point that, in the Old Testament era, an adulterer would have been stoned to death; that would have left his/her spouse free to remarry. Why should the innocent spouse be penalized because God graciously allowed the adulterer to live?

#### F. If You Have Sinned, Accept Christ's Abundant Forgiveness

1. I am well aware—how could I not be?—of the fact that there are some listening to me today who have experienced divorce... and perhaps you are not the innocent party; perhaps it was your own sexual unfaithfulness that destroyed your marriage; or perhaps, you did not understand God's standard on divorce and got divorced sinfully; and now, you have been remarried contrary to God's standards
2. I am well aware that those things can and do happen in the church
3. We have to realize that God sent His Son into the world to save sinners... unlawful divorce and remarriage is a sin, and Christ's blood is abundantly ample to cover all sin
4. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba, murdered her husband, married her and settled into a perverse new life, God judged David by taking the life of the baby conceived... but then, when Bathsheba conceived again and bore David another son, Solomon, God sent word through the prophet Nathan that the baby would be called "Jedidiah", that is "Beloved by the Lord"... lesson: GOD MOVES ON... when you can't rectify your sin, God wants you to make the most of your new situation
5. therefore, though the remarriage should not have taken place, now that it has, God desires you to live honorably within that new situation

#### G. BUT Also... Tell the Truth About It

1. However, if that has happened to you, you can bless the church most by being honest scripturally about it if you are ever in a position to discuss it
2. for example, if you are discipling some young couple and the issue of your first marriage comes up, you can simply say "According to the Scriptural standard Christ has given us, I should never have gotten a divorce or been remarried. If

I had to do it again, I would do it differently. But God has graciously forgiven my sins and now desires me to live godly in my present marriage.”

H. Bottom Line: Marriage is a Delightful Blessing... freedom from divorce is one of the great blessings of a mature Christian marriage