

Studies in the Gospel of Matthew #52

Jesus' Teaching on Divorce

Matt 19:1-12

Introduction:

1. Some yrs ago a journalist for a national news magazine asked rhetorically.
 - a. "Are there any persons left in the land who have not heard a friend or a child or a parent describe the agony of divorce?"
 - b. Divorce has become pandemic, to the point that hardly a person can be found who has not been affected by it either directly or indirectly.
2. Many marriages, including a tragic number of Christian marriages, seem to be little more than a socially recognized battleground where warfare between the spouses is the rule and harmony the exception.
3. Each year in the United States there are well over one million divorces
 - a. For every million divorces, there are two million adults and several more million children who are directly involved.
 - b. None of them escapes suffering and damage, no matter how amicable the divorce may be.
4. Nearly every state has enacted "no fault" divorce laws, making divorce almost as easy as marriage.
5. In past years in this nation the vast majority of marriages held together, and divorce was difficult and rare.
 - a. First was the family moral force.
 - 1) Not only the immediate family but the extended family of grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins was the center of personal loyalty and activity and usually had a tradition of moral and religious convictions.
 - 2) It was these intimate loved ones that all family members, adults as well as children, knew they could depend on for help, comfort, encouragement, and security.
 - 3) But as moral permissiveness, feminism, humanism, easier mobility, and the disruptive and worldly influences of television, movies, and other media began to undermine the family, divorce rapidly increased.
 - b. 2nd reason for family stability in the past was community expectation.
 - 1) Society in general, and the legal system in particular, recognized and strongly supported and protected the primacy of the family as well as a biblically-based morality.
 - 2) Strict laws made divorce difficult, and community ethics and peer pressure made the stigma of it severe.
 - c. The third and strongest of forces that helped maintain family stability was the teaching of the church.
 - 1) Until modern times, every branch of Christendom—Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant—strongly supported family life and just as strongly opposed divorce.
 - 2) But as their constituencies pled for more concessions to worldly standards and practices, church bodies acquiesced, and the family has suffered the bitter consequences of those compromises.
6. In the name of Christian love, some individuals and groups not only condone divorce but insist that it is sometimes God's will.
7. By the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, God expects His redeemed people in Christ to exemplify the original beauty and mutuality of the marriage relationship as well as the grace of forgiveness.
8. The two key attitudes in a successful marriage are self-denial and self-giving, both of which are contrary to human nature but made possible to Christians through the Holy Spirit.
9. The husband and wife who are walking in the Spirit will be walking in unselfish humility and forgiving, restoring love that always puts the other first.

I. The Background and Setting – vs 1-2

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

A. The Place – “beyond Jordan”

1. For 2 yrs Jesus has been preaching, teaching, healing in Galilee
2. Then, for 2 mo, He has been teaching the disciples privately
3. Now Jesus moves to an area "beyond Jordan"
 - a) *This is on the east side of Jordan in the area of Perea*
 - b) *For years that area had been sparsely populated, but by Jesus' day it was well settled*

B. The Plan

1. This was a perilous place for the subject of divorce to be discussed because it was where the ruler Herod Antipas and Herodias lived.
2. Herod had beheaded John the Baptist thru the influence of Herodias.
3. Both had gotten divorced so they could marry each other.
4. John the Baptist rebuked the divorce and this eventually resulted in the beheading of John.
5. Pharisees made the inquiry about divorce in Perea probably because they knew Christ's standards would aggravate Herod

II. The Attack – vs 3

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

A. The People – “Pharisees”

1. The Pharisees were the ones who initiated the inquiry.
 - a) *They were enemies of Christ.*
 - b) *They were His arch-enemies*
 - c) *They had already decided to kill Him*
2. They despised Jesus because He undermined their false teachings and exposed their deceitful living
3. In the other accounts of this episode, it is evident that the Pharisees interrupted Christ's ministry in Perea to inquire about divorce.
4. They had no manners and did not respect Christ.

B. The Purpose – “tempting Him”

1. The Pharisees' purpose in making the inquiry was not to improve their knowledge but to try and ensnare Christ in His words so they could belittle Him before the people.
2. Every time they tried to do this, Christ ensnared them in their words
3. Christ was never outsmarted by the Pharisees. He put them to shame again and again.

C. The Philosophy – “Is it Lawful for a man...”

1. *For every cause* is a reference to one of the divorce philosophies of that day.
2. There were two main philosophies about divorce in those days.
 - a) *The followers of the school of Hillel contended that a man might divorce his wife for various and even trivial causes—they would champion the easy divorce laws of our day.*
 - b) *She let her hair down in public, burned the bread or put too much salt in the food*
 - c) *The followers of the school of Schammai were more strict and permitted divorce only in case of fornication, adultery, or some other moral offense.*
3. The Pharisees felt that if Christ took the liberal view (Hillel), they could criticize Him for claiming to be a Teacher of superior morality.
4. If He took the stricter view (Schammai), they felt it would get Him in trouble with Herod, the divorced ruler, and that was fine with them.
5. But as we will see next, Christ took neither side but took a stand that was higher in morality than any divorce philosophy of that day.

BYZ **Matthew 19:1** Καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοὺς λόγους τούτους, μετήρην ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας, καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς τὰ ὄρια τῆς Ἰουδαίας πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου.

He departed (metēren). Literally, to lift up, change something to another place. Transitive in the LXX and in a Cilician rock inscription. Intransitive in Matthew 13:53 and here, the only N.T. instances. Absence of hoti or kai after kai egeneto, one of the clear Hebraisms in the N.T. (Robertson, Grammar, pp. 1042f.). This verse is a sort of formula in Matthew at the close of important groups of logia as in Matthew 7:28; Matthew 11:1; Matthew 13:53.

The borders of Judea beyond Jordan (eis ta horia tēs Ioudaias peran tou Iordanou). This is a curious expression. It apparently means that Jesus left Galilee to go to Judea by way of Perea as the Galileans often did to avoid Samaria. Luke (Luke 17:11) expressly says that he passed through Samaria and Galilee when he left Ephraim in Northern Judea (John 11:54). He was not afraid to pass through the edge of Galilee and down the Jordan Valley in Perea on this last journey to Jerusalem. McNeile is needlessly opposed to the trans-Jordanic or Peraan aspect of this phase of Christ's work.

BYZ **Matthew 19:2** Καὶ ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ ὄχλοι πολλοί, καὶ ἐθεράπευσεν αὐτοὺς ἐκεῖ.

BYZ **Matthew 19:3** Καὶ προσῆλθον αὐτῷ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι πειράζοντες αὐτόν, καὶ λέγοντες αὐτῷ, Εἰ ἔξεστιν ἀνθρώπῳ ἀπολῦσαι τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ κατὰ πᾶσαν αἰτίαν;

Pharisees tempting him (Pharisaioi peirazontes auton). They "could not ask a question of Jesus without sinister motives" For every cause (kata pasan aitian). This clause is an allusion to the dispute between the two theological schools over the meaning of Deut. 24:1. The school of Shammai took the strict and unpopular view of divorce for unchastity alone while the school of Hillel took the liberal and popular view of easy divorce for any passing whim if the husband saw a prettier woman (modern enough surely) or burnt his biscuits for breakfast. It was a pretty dilemma and meant to do Jesus harm with the people. There is no real trouble about the use of kata here in the sense of propter or because of (Robertson, Grammar, p. 509).

III. The Answer – vs 4-6

A. The Creation – vs 4

4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

1. Jesus did not give a direct yes or no – he went all the way back to the creation
2. “Haven’t you read Genesis?”
3. By quoting from Gen 1:27 and 2:24 Jesus was saying that their argument was not with Him but with God
4. Those words must have stung the proud, self-righteous Pharisees who considered themselves to be the supreme authorities on Scripture

B. The Cleaving – vs 5a

5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife...

1. Adam and Eve had no parents to leave so the leaving of parents principle for future generations
2. The word "cleave" means to be glued to something.
 - a) Job used the same word when he spoke of his bones clinging to his skin and flesh
 - b) The same word was used of Ruth's' clinging to Naomi
 - c) Marriage partners are to be glued to each other in their marriage relationship.
 - d) The implication is obvious. It eliminates divorce.

C. The Commonness – vs 5b-6

5b ... and they twain shall be one flesh? 6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

1. A husband and wife are united together physically in the sex act.
 - a) It is not boyfriend and girlfriend being one flesh but husband and wife.
 - b) Sex is only for married partners.
2. Violation of this has resulted in many divorces; as we will see later, divorce produces this violation.
3. "asunder" = separate has the idea of divorce not a temporary separation

IV. The Argument – vs 7

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

A. Reason for Argument – “They say unto him...”

1. The Pharisees were not interested in what Christ had to say, they wanted to ensnare Him in His talk.
2. They knew that He would quote Scripture so they had a Scriptural rebuttal
3. Since Christ was not being ensnared in His talk, they interrupted Him to ask this question.
4. The Pharisees hoped this new question would put Christ on the spot and ensnare Him in His answers since the first question was not ensnaring Christ in His words.
5. They tried to pit Jesus against the great law-giver Moses

B. Reference in the Argument – “Why did Moses...?”

1. The Mosaic law did not commend, much less command divorce
2. It did permit divorce under certain conditions

4 Ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Οὐκ ἀνέγνωτε ὅτι ὁ ποιήσας ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς,

5 καὶ εἶπεν, Ἐνεκεν τούτου καταλείψει ἄνθρωπος τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὴν μητέρα, καὶ προσκολληθήσεται τῇ γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν;

Shall cleave (kollēthēsetai). First future passive, "shall be glued to," the verb means.

The twain shall become one flesh (esontai hoi duo eis sarka mian). This use of eis after eimi is an imitation of the Hebrew, though a few examples occur in the older Greek and in the papyri. The frequency of it is due to the Hebrew and here the LXX is a direct translation of the Hebrew idiom.

6 Ὅστε οὐκέτι εἰσὶν δύο, ἀλλὰ σὰρξ μία· ὁ οὖν ὁ θεὸς συνέζευξεν, ἄνθρωπος μὴ χωριζέτω.

What therefore God hath joined together (ho oun ho theos sunezeuxen). Note "what," not "whom." The marriage relation God has made. "The creation of sex, and the high doctrine as to the cohesion it produces between man and woman, laid down in Gen., interdict separation" (Bruce). The word for "joined together" means "yoked together," a common verb for marriage in ancient Greek. It is the timeless aorist indicative (sunezeuxen), true always.

Bill (biblion). A little biblos (see note on §Matthew 1:1), a scroll or document (papyrus or parchment). This was some protection to the divorced wife and a restriction on laxity

7 Λέγουσιν αὐτῷ, Τί οὖν Μωσῆς ἐνετείλατο δοῦναι βιβλίον ἀποστασίου, καὶ ἀπολῦσαι αὐτήν;

V. The Affirmation – vs 8-9

A. Cause – vs 8

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

1. The words, "hardness of your hearts" is the cause of divorce.
2. That exposes all the other excuses given for divorce as bogus.
3. Hard hearts, not holy hearts, cause divorce.
 - a) It is hard hearts that hurt the children through divorce.
 - b) It is hard hearts that bring problems on society through divorce.
 - c) It is hard hearts that will not submit to God's standard in marriage.
 - d) It is hard hearts that trample on sacred marriage vows.
 - e) It is hard hearts that treat a marriage partner so cruelly as to divorce them.

B. Contrast – vs 8

1. The "beginning" refers to creation.
 - a) God did not create man and woman to divorce.
 - b) In the creation God planned for marriage to be permanent.
 - c) Divorce was not in the picture.
2. It only came because of the "hardness of your hearts."

C. The Exemption – vs 9

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

1. *Porneia* here translated **immorality**, is a broad term that encompasses all illicit sexual activity.
2. In the context of marriage it always constituted **adultery**; which, by definition, is illicit sex by a married person.
3. He was saying that divorce that does not result *from* adultery results *in* **adultery** if there is remarriage.

D. The Evil – vs 9

1. If God is gracious to the sinning spouse by tolerating divorce instead of requiring execution, He would surely also be gracious to the innocent spouse by permitting remarriage, which was permissible when a spouse died (cf. [Rom. 7:2-3](#)).
2. The purpose of permitting divorce is to show mercy to the sinning spouse, not to condemn the innocent one to a lifetime of singleness and loneliness that would not be required if the Lord had the sinning partner executed.
3. Should His grace to the sinner penalize the innocent?
4. The Lord allows divorce in order that the adulterer might have opportunity to repent rather than be put to death.
5. And both here and in [Matthew 5:32](#) Jesus specifically allows remarriage by the innocent spouse in order that he or she might have opportunity to enjoy again the blessings of marriage that were destroyed by the other partners adultery.
6. The qualification **except for immorality** clearly permits the innocent party who **marries another** to do so *without* committing **adultery**.
7. Here is a devastating indictment of the Pharisees who were then trying to devastate Him.

BYZ **Matthew 19:8** Λέγει αὐτοῖς ὅτι Μωσῆς πρὸς τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν ὑμῶν ἐπέτρεψεν ὑμῖν ἀπολύσαι τὰς γυναῖκας ὑμῶν· ἀπ' ἀρχῆς δὲ οὐ γέγονεν οὕτως.

For your hardness of heart (pros tēn sklērōkardian hūmōn). The word is apparently one of the few Biblical words (LXX and the N.T.). It is a heart dried up (sklēros), hard and tough.

But from the beginning it hath not been so (ap' archēs de ouk gegonen houtōs). The present perfect active of ginomai to emphasize the permanence of the divine ideal. "The original ordinance has never been abrogated nor superseded, but continues in force" (Vincent). "How small the Pharisaic disputants must have felt in presence of such holy teaching, which soars above the partisan view of controversialists into the serene region of ideal, universal, eternal truth" (Bruce).

BYZ **Matthew 19:9** Λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι ὅς ἂν ἀπολύσῃ τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, μὴ ἐπὶ πορνείᾳ, καὶ γαμήσῃ ἄλλην, μοιχᾶται· καὶ ὁ ἀπολελυμένην γαμήσας μοιχᾶται.

Except for fornication (parektos logou porneias). This is the marginal reading in Westcott and Hort which also adds "maketh her an adulteress" (poiei autēn moicheuthēnai) and also these words: "and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery" (kai ho apolelumenēn gamēsas moichatai). There seems to be a certain amount of assimilation in various manuscripts between this verse and the words in Matthew 5:32. But, whatever reading is accepted here, even the short one in Westcott and Hort (mē epi porneiāi, not for fornication), it is plain that Matthew represents Jesus in both places as allowing divorce for fornication as a general term (porneia) which is technically adultery (moicheia from moichaō or moicheuō). Here, as in Matthew 5:31-32, a group of scholars deny the genuineness of the exception given by Matthew alone. McNeile holds that "the addition of the saving clause is, in fact, opposed to the spirit of the whole context, and must have been made at a time when the practice of divorce for adultery had already grown up." That in my opinion is gratuitous criticism which is unwilling to accept Matthew's report because it disagrees with one's views on the subject of divorce. He adds: "It cannot be supposed that Matthew wished to represent Jesus as siding with the school of Shammai." Why not, if Shammai on this point agreed with Jesus? Those who deny Matthew's report are those who are opposed to remarriage at all. Jesus by implication, as in Matthew 5:31, does allow remarriage of the innocent party, but not of the guilty one. Certainly Jesus has lifted the whole subject of marriage and divorce to a new level, far beyond the petty contentions of the schools of Hillel and Shammai.

VI. The Appropriation – vs 10-12

A. The Conclusion – vs 10

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

1. By this time the Pharisees had left
2. The disciples' reaction to Christ's divorce rules is typical of human nature.
 - a) *Tell a person he is limited and he will often pout and take it to the extreme.*
 - b) *When a child is restricted in some area, he will often pout and say he can't do anything.*
 - c) *Christ's instructions about divorce did not even hint that it was not good to marry.*
3. His instructions said it was not good to divorce.
4. The disciples did understand that Jesus referring to a lifetime commitment

B. The Correcting – vs 11-12

11 But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. 12 For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

1. Eunuch by Childbirth
 - a) *Here is one born with a physical defect making it impossible for that one to reproduce*
2. Eunuch by Castration
 - a) *This was common for officers of a king's court*
 - b) *The harem guards of the day were in this category*
3. Eunuch by Choice
 - a) *This does not involve physical castration but the principle of self-denial fro the purpose of better promoting the work of God*
 - b) *This is voluntary and not demanded of God*
 - c) *This is not to be confused to the unbiblical celibacy of Roman Catholic priests*

^{YZ} **Matthew 19:10** Λέγουσιν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ, Εἰ οὕτως ἐστὶν ἡ αἰτία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μετὰ τῆς γυναικός, οὐ συμφέρει γαμῆσαι.
The disciples say unto him (legousin autōi hoi mathētai). "Christ's doctrine on marriage not only separated Him toto caelo from Pharisaic opinions of all shades, but was too high even for the Twelve" (Bruce).

The case (hē aitia). The word may refer to the use in Matthew 19:3 "for every cause." It may have a vague idea here = res, condition. But the point clearly is that "it is not expedient to marry" (ou sumpherei gamēsai) if such a strict view is held. If the bond is so tight a man had best not commit matrimony. It is a bit unusual to have anthrōpos and gunē contrasted rather than anēr and gunē.

^{BYZ} **Matthew 19:11** Ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Οὐ πάντες χωροῦσιν τὸν λόγον τοῦτον, ἀλλ' οἷς δέδοται.

But they to whom it is given (all' hois dedotai). A neat Greek idiom, dative case of relation and perfect passive indicative. The same idea is repeated at the close of Matthew 19:12. It is a voluntary renunciation of marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. "Jesus recognizes the severity of the demand as going beyond the capacity of all but a select number." It was a direct appeal to the spiritual intelligence of the disciples not to misconceive his meaning as certainly the monastic orders have done.

^{BYZ} **Matthew 19:12** Εἰσὶν γὰρ εὐνοῦχοι, οἵτινες ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς ἐγεννήθησαν οὕτως· καὶ εἰσὶν εὐνοῦχοι, οἵτινες εὐνουχίσθησαν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων· καὶ εἰσὶν εὐνοῦχοι, οἵτινες εὐνούχισαν ἑαυτοὺς διὰ τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν. Ὁ δυνάμενος χωρεῖν χωρεῖτω.