

Matthew 19 Part 1-Question About Divorce – Radio Show #399

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. The Lord had just been teaching Peter the importance of unending forgiveness in the light of all God has forgiven us. Now, His ministry continues in Matthew 19.

III. Lawful Divorce. Matthew 19:1-12.

- A. Verse 1. Notice the chronological statements throughout here. These things are in sequence, not just randomly put together from various times in His ministry. Even if chronology was not important to Israelites back then, but God marks chronology in His Word regardless. He left His home country and came into Judea, the religious district of Israel, once again. Even though He went south, He went east as well to the other side of the Jordan. This was the traditional land of Reuben, Gad, and half Manasseh. At this time, it was called Perea, east of Judea, between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. North of there on the east side of the Sea of Galilee was Decapolis.
- B. Verse 2. The fourth time multitudes are noted in Matthew. He did indeed draw huge crowds! His miracles did not diminish. The word He spoke was always confirmed.
- C. Verse 3. These were the local Pharisees, not those of Jerusalem. “Testing” is a word that can also mean “tempting.” In this case, they were probably seeking a cause of accusation in something He said, so this was likely tempting. Divorce was a right generally reserved only for the man. A woman could not loose herself. Is it right for a man to divorce for any cause or fault? There were some rabbis who taught this: that a man being the king of his house could put his wife aside for any cause whatsoever. Others suggested it had to be for serious reasons. We need to understand their culture and the fact that divorce would be a near total disaster for the woman, and not very serious at all for the man. Because of the family business structure.
- D. Verse 4. The third time He asks His enemies if they have not read the Bible in Matthew. “At the beginning” is the Greek *ap arche*, a common phrase in Scripture, but it does not always refer to the same beginning. We must ask ourselves, “From the beginning of what?” In this case, from the beginning of the world and from creation. This is a reference to Genesis 1:27. The Lord Jesus Christ puts His stamp of approval on the Genesis account of the creation of man! He has no idea that man made himself over millions of years by a process of evolution. This is the vain imagination of men.
- E. Verse 5. Quoting from Genesis 2:(18-)24. “Reason” is not the same word as in the Pharisees’ question, but meaning because of or for the sake of this.
 1. They were to be joined, as with glue. In the beginning, God said it was not good for man to be alone. It was not good then, before the fall, and it is not good now. In the same way, it will not be good for them to be alone in the kingdom of God. God intended the two to join together and become one flesh. Sin and death, however, got in the way. Yet these will be taken out of the way in the kingdom. This kind of marriage should be what we strive for now.
 2. People can choose to be single, of course, or it may be they do not choose it but fail to find a partner. Yet the good thing has been and remains to find a marriage partner. But while the finding is good, the departing from the parents and joining to the partner makes sure it actually becomes good in practice!

3. The Greeks have no word for “wife,” so this is “his woman.”
 4. “Two” was not in Genesis 2:24, but is added by the Lord here for emphasis.
 5. They are one flesh not just because they went and got a marriage license and someone performed a ceremony and proclaimed this over them. This takes joining together, a lot of work, a lot of learning and a lot of practice on the part of both of them. They have to make it that way.
- F. Verse 6. God has paired or yoked them together, as animals are yoked to pull a load. Marriage is indeed a pulling together through the hard work of life! This confounds the whole thing. The question arises: what about those man has joined together?
1. This is how it will be under God’s government: no one will marry without God being involved and showing His approval. This is not unusual, for in our country the state issues the license that gives people the right to get married, and the state also regulates divorce. In the kingdom, God will govern who will marry, and that will eliminate mistakes. Yet we cannot just take this principle and try to apply it at this present time.
 2. Remember that the Lord here is dealing with His enemies, those who came testing Him, not because they wanted to learn. There were selfish men among them who wanted absolute power over their wives for any silly reason their hearts desired. A man alone was not so badly off at that time, but a woman alone was in desperate straits. She had to find a way to live, and that was extremely difficult for a woman alone. Thus these women were badly mistreated by the careless acts of ungodly men. Christ must speak against this.
 3. Bullinger points out that the opposite is true. If God has divided, we need to rightly divide as He does, not join together.

IV. Conclusion: The Pharisees wanted to discredit the Lord by His teaching on divorce. The Lord, however, pointed out the sinful character of divorce in the first place. Many of these religious leaders wanted to increase the power of the man over his wife at her expense, but the Lord’s teaching was full of compassion on the mistreated and helpless. Let us always have compassion on the most harmed and helpless in the immoral climate of our society! We will discuss this more in our next program.