

Chapter 19

FAMILY AND POSSESSIONS IN VIEW OF THE KINGDOM (19:1–20:16)

From Galilee to Judea (19:1–2)

Matthew 19:1 Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.

Now when Jesus had finished.... This is how Matthew concludes Jesus' five great teaching sections.

"And when Jesus finished these sayings...." (Matthew 7:28, ESV). This ends the section Matthew 5-7.

"When Jesus had finished instructing...." (Matthew 11:1, ESV). This ends the section Matthew 10.

"And when Jesus had finished these parables...." (Matthew 13:53, ESV). This ends the section Matthew 13.

"Now when Jesus had finished these sayings...." (Matthew 19:1–2, ESV). This ends the section Matthew 18.

"When Jesus had finished all these sayings...." (Matthew 26:1, ESV). This ends the section Matthew 24-25.

In 18:1, the disciples had come to Jesus asking questions. Now in 19:1 we have the end of that conversation. All of chapter 18 was one conversation on the various manifestations of one topic. **However, in a larger sense, it is a part of all the material from the Transfiguration (17:22) to the Triumphal Entry (21:1). These are the critical issues Jesus wants to share with his disciples before the passion week.**

he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea.... We have known for some time now that Jesus was planning to leave Galilee and go to Jerusalem.

"From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." (Matthew 16:21, ESV)

"As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men," (Matthew 17:22, ESV)

"Jesus leaves Galilee, which will not see him again until after the resurrection (28:7, 16). The earthly ministry there, which commenced with 4:12, has now concluded, the trek to the holy city has begun."¹

¹ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 3; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 6.

Matthew 19:2 And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

large crowds followed.... They are all heading to the Passover feast in the safety and fellowship of a crowd.

he healed them.... Jesus now begins a ministry in Judea like the one he had in Galilee.



One Plus One Equals One (19:3–12) (Matthew 5:31-32; Mark 10:2-12)

As chapter 18 dealt with issues found in the Sermon on the Mount, reconciling with estranged believers, cutting off hands, forgiveness, so now this section does so as well dealing for a second time with divorce. We continue to see what some call the little Sermon on the Mount.

Is It Lawful? (19:3-6)

In 18:21-35 there is a powerful passage on forgiveness and here in 19:3-12 we have a sad story of sin in need of forgiveness. In the light of this, it appears that the overarching point is that forgiveness is a better solution than exclusion from the church and is also a better solution than exclusion from the marriage: divorce.

Matthew 19:3 And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?”

From at least chapter 9:11 the Pharisees have been aware of Jesus’ ministry. Their they criticized him for eating with tax collectors and sinners. In 9:34 they accuse him of casting out demons by the prince of demons. In 12:2 they accuse his disciples of breaking the law for plucking and eating grain on the Sabbath. In 12:14 they determine to murder him for healing a man on the Sabbath. In 12:24 they again accuse him of casting our demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons. In 15:12 they took offense because he criticized their food laws. In chapter 16 Jesus warns his disciples of the teaching of the Pharisees.

They have had their eye on him for some time now, seeking his harm. They now question him about divorce. **It may be that they chose this subject because they understood John the Baptist lost his life over speaking out on this very subject.** Perhaps they could get Jesus to do the same thing.

“For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, because John had been saying to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet. But when Herod’s birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod,” (Matthew 14:3–6, ESV)

Jesus had already addressed divorce in the Sermon on the Mount, but it is not likely that they were familiar with this.

“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” (Matthew 5:31–32, ESV)

tested².... Every use of this word in Matthew is negative meaning to trick or deceive. They were not honest men seeking to learn; they were wolves in sheep’s clothing seeking to do harm.

Is it lawful³.... “This phrase literally means, “Is it right?” But since in Israel what was right had to be traced to biblical law and to this law’s authoritative interpretation by Bible teachers, the translation “Is it biblical?” catches the spirit of the question.”⁴

for any cause.... This phrase was based on a passage in Deuteronomy although Jesus will make clear that “any cause” is not a part of Moses’ teaching.

“When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house,” (Deuteronomy 24:1, ESV)

“The two main schools of Pharisaic teachers debated the meaning of Deuteronomy 24:1, in which a man finds “any matter of indecency” ... in his wife and hence divorces her. The School of Shammai interpreted Deuteronomy 24 as indicating that a man could divorce his wife for the cause of unfaithfulness (“indecency”); the School of Hillel

² *tested* *πειράζω* “...to obtain information to be used against a person by trying to cause someone to make a mistake—‘to try to trap, to attempt to catch in a mistake.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

³ *Is it lawful* *ἔξεστιν*. Is it “possible, referring to moral possibility or propriety meaning it is lawful, right, permitted....” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

⁴ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 249.

understood the passage to mean that a man could divorce his wife for any cause, even burning his toast (“any matter”...).”⁵

Matthew 19:4 He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,

Have you not read.... Jesus ignores their question and discusses a related topic that is more foundational than their question.

created⁶.... To “make something that has not been in existence before (Ge 1:1); (nif) be created (Ge 2:4....”⁷ The word **create** in both Hebrew and Greek makes **it clear that it was God who created man, male and female, they did not evolve. They had a beginning and he was the cause of that beginning.**

Jesus anchors his argument on divorce in the creation of God. The creator sets in motion *the laws of his creation, including the laws of marriage*. We are all aware of God’s material laws that govern the universe, like gravity for instance. But we may not be aware that God has also established behavioral laws, like the Ten Commandments for instance. One is just as binding as the other. Defying God’s material laws can put you in the hospital; defying God’s behavioral laws can put you in hell.

The fact of a creator and a creation is the basis of how men and women are to live. Because man is created by a creator he is of necessity subject to that creator’s purpose for his creation. Jesus is saying that it is not about what a man may want, it is about what God wants.

from the beginning.... “Jesus’ phrase means that in God’s *ordinary* plan ... there has never been any other will for sexual life, “from the very beginning,” than the creation of one man for one woman....”⁸

made them male⁹ and female¹⁰.... “The differences between the sexes and sexuality itself are not penalties of sin; they are presents of creation: “*the Creator* made them” sexual, “male and female.””¹¹ These gifts existed before the Fall. However, the Fall has defiled and defaced them.

⁵ Keener, C. S. (1997). *Matthew* (Vol. 1). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

⁶ *created* κτίζω “...to make or create something which has not existed before—‘to create, creation’....” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

⁷ Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁸ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 250.

⁹ *male* ἄρσεν the male of any living creature—‘male, man.’ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 703.

¹⁰ *female* θῆλυς the female of any living creature—‘female, woman.’ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 703.

¹¹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 250.

“So God created man [adam] in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27, ESV)

Contrary to modern opinion, there are no other sexes, they are biologically determined, not emotionally fabricated.

Matthew 19:5 and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’?

hold fast¹².... “To glue together, to make cohere.”¹³

and the two shall become one flesh’....

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24, ESV)

The Biblical standard is for a marriage to be between a man (male) and a wife (female). Until recent years no one would have given a second thought to making that obvious point.

Malachi had earlier addressed the topic of divorce using the same idea of God making two into one.

“Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.” (Malachi 2:15, ESV)

In looking for an analogy on the two working as one unit, I thought of our two hands. They are not one hand, they do not have the same task, one is stronger than the other, yet when the hard jobs need to be done, they work as a coordinated unit. One could live with only one hand, but there are always difficulties in doing so. The ideal is a coordinated, cooperative effort of the two. In union with a human being the two hands do not lose their individuality. Generally, one hand is doing one task and the other hand another task—until the cooperative strength of the whole is needed to deal with life’s more difficulty problems.

Matthew 19:6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

are no longer two.... ““No longer two” means no longer totally *independent*, no longer two *isolated* integers. Just as the religious union of the soul with Christ does not wipe out but establishes the freedom of the believer for the first time, so the marriage union of two persons does not destroy but supports the free development of each individual.”¹⁴

¹² *hold fast* κολλάω “...to begin an association with someone, whether temporary or permanent—to join, to join oneself to, to become a part of.” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 447.

¹³ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

¹⁴ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 253.

Or at least it would have in a world without sin. Sin has changed that.

“To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.” (Genesis 3:16, ESV)

This passage describes the result of this fall, two behaviors that afflict the relationship with sin and pain tearing the union apart.

What therefore (the) God has joined together.... It is not any God that has done this, it is **the** God, the God of the created order.

“He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,” (Matthew 19:4, ESV)

joined together¹⁵.... “...it is a union which has the naturalness of a divinely appointed order of things.”¹⁶ As two animals pull together in a yoke, so two people are to pull together in confronting life’s difficulties. “Jesus does not say “what God has bedded together,” or “domesticated together,” or even, simply, “linked together” Husband and wife, according to Jesus’ picture, are spanned together by God under a common yoke, suggesting they are united in order to *work together* on a common task.”¹⁷

“Disciples of Jesus who read this description of marriage as a being “yoked together” think first, instinctively, of *raising children together* in faith and discipleship; then they think of *assisting each other as husband and wife* in being faithful in fulfilling their assigned roles in life; they think also of their lives as *servicing a single great purpose*—the glory of God in the church of Jesus Christ for the sake of mission in the world. **Jesus’ “yoke” picture of marriage as *shared work* dignifies both marriage and work, for it says that marriage is a task, an obedience, and a calling, and it says that work need no longer be alone or unaided but that it has a partner who “pulls for us.”**¹⁸

let not man¹⁹ **separate....** “...by which Jesus is calling on his contemporaries to stop their promiscuous teaching and practice of divorce.”²⁰

¹⁵ *joined together συζεύγνυμι* “To yoke together as animals...” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

¹⁶ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

¹⁷ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 255.

¹⁸ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 255.

¹⁹ *man ἄνθρωπος* human being (normally an adult)—(in the singular) ‘person, human being, individual,’ (in the plural) ‘people, persons, mankind.’ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 103.

²⁰ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 254.

“If God has joined them together, according to the structure of his own creation, divorce is not only “unnatural” but rebellion against God.”²¹ “Jesus’ initial comment focusses sharply on the language of ‘one flesh’: ‘no longer two but one flesh’ aligns divorce with the violence of something like mutilation, amputation, or dismemberment.”²²

Why Then Did Moses? (19:7-9)

Matthew 19:7 *They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?”*

Why then.... The Pharisees object to Jesus comments. They are going to try to get Jesus to contradict Moses as they did earlier.

“Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.” (Matthew 15:2, ESV)

The readers wonder, “what is going to happen, since they know that for Jesus the word of Moses and the word of the creator cannot contradict one another (cf. 5:17). How will Jesus solve the problem? Verse 8 offers the solution.”²³

command...certificate of divorce.... The Pharisees now mention another verse Deuteronomy 24:1 in their effort to justify divorce. But, they do not reference verses 3-4, which gives the context and meaning to verse 1. It turns out that “what is “commanded” or forbidden there is only a man’s remarriage with his ex-wife....”²⁴

*“When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes **because** he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man’s wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.”* (Deuteronomy 24:1–4, ESV)

“...the Hebrew more naturally means something like this: “If a man takes a wife ... and she does not find favor in his eyes ... and he writes a bill of divorce ... and he sends her away from his house ... and her second husband does the same thing, then her first husband must not marry her again”²⁵ **In other words, this passage does not provide justification to divorce, but information on who one cannot remarry after a second divorce—the first husband.** This the Pharisees conveniently overlooked. Instead, they

²¹ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 412). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

²² Nolland John. (2005). Preface. *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

²³ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 490.

²⁴ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 490.

²⁵ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 412). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

chose to focus on the word *indecenty* found in verse 1 with its many possible meanings.

In their hypocrisy, the Pharisees are attempting to take the higher ground by appealing to Moses and implying “we’re only doing what Moses commanded us to do.” **But the command deals with who you may not remarry, it is not a command to divorce.**

Matthew 19:8 He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

Jesus destroys their “higher ground” stance by clarifying the root of the problem—their hard heart.

hardness of heart.... This hardness of heart refers to the person doing the *indecenty* not to the person that is the victim of the *indecenty*.

Moses allowed.... The Pharisees insisted that divorce was a result of ***Moses command*** (19:7). Jesus responds that in fact ***Moses allowed***. “If Moses permitted it, he did so because sin can be so vile that divorce is to be preferred to continued “indecenty.””²⁶

from the beginning.... Again, Jesus refers to the beginning of marriage (19:4) as the bases of what a marriage should really be like, to a time before the ***hardness*** of their ***heart***.

“Genesis (the “Beginning” Book) gives us God’s *pristine* will on marriage; Deuteronomy gives us God’s *permissive* will for failed marriage....”²⁷

Matthew 19:9 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery [and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery].

We have much the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount.

“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” (Matthew 5:31–32, ESV)

And [but] I say to you.... This is a phrase commonly found in the Sermon on the Mount.

The outline of this problem found here in chapter 19 is very similar to that in chapter 5. In chapter 5 we had the:

²⁶ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 413). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

²⁷ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 261.

Traditional Piety: *“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’”* (Matthew 5:31, ESV)

Vicious Cycle: *“But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”* (Matthew 5:32, ESV)

Transforming Counsel: *“To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.”* (1 Corinthians 7:10–11, ESV)

Here in chapter 19, we have something very similar.

Traditional Piety: *“And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?’”* (Matthew 19:3, ESV)

Vicious Cycle: *“They said to him, ‘Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?’ He said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.’”* (Matthew 19:7–9, ESV)

Transforming Counsel: *“He answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.’”* (Matthew 19:4–6, ESV)

To this we must add the transforming counsel of the first triad in the sermon both filling out the transforming counsel that brings solution to the problem: *“leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”* (Matthew 5:24, ESV)

There is a significant similarity in the two passages. Together they give a full picture on failed public opinion, the tragedy that results from such an opinion, and last, the counsel that provides solution.

sexual immorality²⁸.... Jesus states one exception clause and thereby defines the **“indecency”** spoken of in Deuteronomy 24:1 as **“sexual immorality.”** The Greek word refers to any sexual activity outside of marriage and not just adultery. “The best assumption is that the indecency was any lewd, immoral behavior, sometimes including, but not restricted to, adultery—e.g. lesbianism or sexual misconduct....”²⁹

and marries another, commits adultery.... The person that instigated the divorce on grounds other than **sexual immorality** is then guilty of **adultery** if they marry another.

²⁸ *sexual immorality πορνεία* “...to commit fornication or any sexual sin. Fornication, lewdness, or any sexual sin.” Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

²⁹ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 413). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

adultery.... “...sexual intercourse of a man with a married woman other than his own spouse....”³⁰

[and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery]. This phrase is found in the Majority Text tradition of the Greek New Testament. I assume such readings are original.

It would seem that the meaning here would be that a person that knowingly married a person who proved to be guilty of fornication, was showing little respect for moral purity and was at that point joining the side of sexual immorality.

“Matthew’s *exception* that allows divorce comes very close to, if it is not exactly the same thing as, Moses’ *permission* that allows divorce.”³¹

In summary, “Jesus is then saying that divorce and remarriage always involve evil; but as Moses permitted it because of the hardness of men’s hearts, so also does he—but now on the sole grounds of *porneia* (sexual sin of any sort).”³² He denies divorce for “any cause.”

One must keep in mind the sinful double standard that men maintained in that day and understand that Jesus’ teachings apply to both men and women equally.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28, ESV)

We also must take note of the common reasons that most, including Christians, use to get a divorce— “we’ve grown apart,” “we don’t love each other anymore,” “he won’t talk to me,” “our life is a financial ship wreck because of her/him,” “I’m a nervous wreck, I can’t go on,” “I’ve come to hate him/her.” These in fact are serious issues and scream to be addressed³³ but divorce is not the way a Christian can address them.

Paul calls into question the salvation of those that practice *porneia* (πορνεία) or sexual immorality.

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,” (1 Corinthians 6:9, ESV)

If Such is the Case (19:10-12)

³⁰ *adultery μοιχάω* “...sexual intercourse of a man with a married woman other than his own spouse—to commit adultery, adultery.” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

³¹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 261.

³² Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 417). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

³³ Bass, Ralph E, Jr. (2002) *Hope for Today’s Problems*, Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press.

Matthew 19:10 *The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”*

If such is the case.... The disciples now enter the discussion *on the side of the Pharisees* and state if they can’t divorce their wives for “**any cause**” (19:3) then one should not marry at all. One would assume their wives were not listening.

Matthew 19:11 *But he said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.*

this saying.... What saying? It is probably verse 9.

“And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” (Matthew 19:9, ESV)

Not everyone can receive this saying.... So, in essence Jesus is agreeing with the disciples that in some cases it is better not to marry.

So, the phrase in 19:11: **those to whom it is given** would be addressing the gift of singleness—a gift that must be **given** for it is not natural to the human condition.

Therefore, in agreeing with the disciples that in some cases it is better not to marry, Jesus is reinforcing his former statement on the permanence of marriage. One does not need to “**receive this**” or the permanence of marriage, that is the commandment of God and that is in force whether you receive it or not. What needs to be received is the single state, that is unnatural and needs to be **given**.

Matthew 19:12 *For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”*

The word **For**, links us back to verse 11 and confirms the idea of that Jesus is talking about receiving the gift of singleness, not on receiving his teaching on the permanence of marriage.

eunuchs³⁴.... At this point, one wonders how we got on the topic of eunuchs. Certainly, eunuchs do not marry, but why use them as illustrations of those that do not marry? Why not just use the term “unmarried” or “single?” I think the answer is found in the respect that Jews paid to the marriage state; if you were not dead, then you got married and had children. This was the natural order of things and there were virtually no exceptions to it. However, being a eunuch was one obvious exception and virtually no others.

So, Jesus next addresses three ways in which men can be eunuchs—and thus not marry, which carries on the discussion of verses 10-11 above.

³⁴ *eunuchs* ευνουχος “...the term from the beginning was applied to officials who were in charge of a harem. Because this office was normally carried out by those who had been castrated, the word developed the sense “emasculated” and could be applied even to castrated animals and to plants that do not bear seed. Sometimes when the term is used of a high official of state....” Bromiley, G. W. (Ed.). (1979–1988). In *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*. Wm. B. Eerdmans.

First there is **from birth**, in essence a birth defect.

Then there is **by men**. It was common for kings in the East to make eunuchs of most palace and government slaves, especially if these slaves came from a royal family. One reason was to eliminate threats to the throne. People in high government positions were the very ones who might have an interest in overthrowing the crown and making themselves kings. But this was not as likely if they had no one to pass the kingdom to upon their death. Another reason would be to protect the harem.

In passing, it is thought that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were probably made eunuchs in preparation for their upcoming government service. "Heathen monarchs almost invariably had large numbers of these unfortunates, who frequently attained to positions of high power and responsibility. Herodotus states their frequent occurrence among the Persians (Hist. vi.32), and in the light of 2 Ki 20:18 and Dan 1:3 it appears as not impossible that Daniel and his friends belonged to this class."³⁵

The third is **made themselves eunuchs**. This, Jesus states is **for the sake of the kingdom of heaven**. Jesus does not state how this might result in a benefit toward this end, nor what it means to make oneself a eunuch. As a result, some in the early church took this literally, as did the Church father Origen.

"The attitude of the early Church to self-mutilation appears to have been ambivalent. The Mt. 19:12 saying wielded a strong influence and in early exegesis was frequently interpreted literally (TDNT, II, 768). Nevertheless, only a few early Christians (the great theologian and linguist Origen, A.D. 185–254, being the most celebrated example) took the drastic step of self-castration in hope of avoiding temptation or sexual sin."

However, since Jesus was so fond of hyperbole, many feel that this is how he is speaking here. In fact, he is simply making the point that some will exercise the gift of singleness for the sake of ministry.

Paul may have been speaking of those in ministry when he said:

"I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife," (1 Corinthians 7:32–33, ESV)

"So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better." (1 Corinthians 7:38, ESV)

Although not a superior state in itself, being unmarried may for some men allow for greater focus on ministry.

"But it is important to recognize that neither Jesus nor the apostles see celibacy as an intrinsically holier state than marriage (cf. 1 Tim 4:1–3; Heb 13:4), nor as a condition for the top levels of ministry (Matt 8:14; 1 Cor 9:5), but as a special calling granted for greater usefulness in the kingdom. Those who impose this discipline on themselves

³⁵ Orr, J. (Ed.). (1999). In *The International Standard Bible encyclopedia: 1915 edition*. Albany, OR: Ages Software.

must remember Paul's conclusion: it is better to marry than to burn with passion (1 Cor 7:9)."³⁶

This brings us back to the disciple's comment in Matthew 19:10: "*If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry*" and Jesus response in 19:11 "*Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.*" 'Jesus would be saying that marriage is permanent and you cannot divorce. If that is a constraint in your life or ministry then, yes, it would be better not to marry.'

"In any case, it is important that Jesus, much as was later the case with Paul, did not require his followers to remain unmarried. While his logion refers positively to the existence of people who because of the kingdom of God forgo the married life, it does not call upon people to do so."³⁷

So, we again look at Jesus' statement: ***Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.*** Some can remain single, but most cannot.

³⁶ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 419). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

³⁷ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 502.