

Title: Marriage, Divorce and God's Grace
Text: Matthew 19: 1-10
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Matthew 19:1: And it came to pass, *that* when Jesus had finished these sayings,

“These sayings” were our Master’s instruction to never offend brethren then to forgive without limit those brethren who have offended you.

Matthew 19:1:...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. 3: The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him,...

This is how it is in our day. Where you find Christ healing his people; you also find Pharisees—legalists, who are in fact lawless, antinomians, trying to come to God unlawfully by their lawkeeping.

Self-righteous, self-sanctifying religious folks will use this very passage to do the very same thing the Pharisee’s were doing in this passage—that is, to tempt Christ.

Here was Christ healing sinners. It was a glorious display of Christ’s ability to heal sinner spiritually and to forgive us our sins by his successful accomplished redemption of his people.

Yet, there are always those who would have the focus to be off of Christ and his work of grace to needy sinners and on their works using questions like these. They were trying to justify themselves for their infidelity toward Christ—their infidelity being their attempt to come to God by their lawkeeping.

Yet, Christ answered their questions. So tonight we will look into the Lord’s word concerning marriage.

Proposition: As believers, if we would honor Christ in our lives and in our attitude toward others, as we look at this subject let each of us, as the church and bride of Christ, be reminded of our marriage to Christ Jesus.

I. THE QUESTION—Matthew 19: 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?

Notice the way they worded their question—**v3: Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?**

In that day, divorce was as common as it is in our day. The attitude was, like it is today, “every cause” is a good cause to dissolve a marriage in divorce. Men and women enter the marriage covenant thinking if any cause arises, it is justifiable to get a divorce.

We get an idea of how corrupted man’s idea of marriage had become in their day, by the disciples comment in verse 10. After hearing the Lord’s answer that marriage is for life, **v10: His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.** In other words, they said, “If a man cannot divorce his wife for any cause, then it is not good to marry at all.”

So they asked the Master this question, **v3: Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?**

II. THE ANSWER--Our Lord answers that marriage is for life—**Matthew 19: 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, 5: And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: 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.**

Notice, “**at the beginning [in the Genesis] God made** male and female.” And **God said**, “For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?”

God made the marriage covenant and union between husband and wife, to picture the marriage covenant and union between Christ and his bride, the church, every believer in particular. When a sinner is born-again by the Holy Spirit and called to faith in Christ the believer becomes subject to Christ as our Head, our Lord, as well as our Savior—this is pictured in the wife’s reverence toward her husband.

Ephesians 5: 22: Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. 23: For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. 24: Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let the wives be* to their own husbands in every thing.

Christ becomes to the believer the one who loved us and gave himself for us—to picture that, the husband is to love his bride as Christ loves the church.

Ephesians 5: 25: Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Christ’s love for his people is what moved him to enter the marriage covenant with his bride. Christ entered into covenant to save his bride—all God’s elect—for his great love wherewith he loved us. So it is between husband and wife. Without love there can be no marriage.

Love sacrifices self—love gives, rather than takes. Christ gave himself for those given to him of the Father, his elect.

Love commits in full devotion—Christ shall never put away his bride. He sanctifies and washes his bride to make her holy. Likewise the husband is to be joined to his wife for life, to sanctify her as his bride-set apart for him by God from before the foundation of the world—even as God sanctified us before time began. The husband is to cover her sins, to forgive her and keep her, being fully devoted to her as his own body—as Christ covered our sins, forgives us and keep us being fully devoted to us as his own body. Christ does so for his bride because the believer is one flesh with Christ

Ephesians 5: 28: So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 29: For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: 30: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

Believer, we are members of Christ’s body, of his flesh and of his bones.

Ephesians 1: 22:...the church, 23: Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

The believers union with Christ is our constraint against infidelity.

1 Corinthians 6:15: Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. 16: What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. 17: But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. 18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. [Christ’s own body.]

So a husband is to give himself for his bride, for she is his own body.

And because we are one flesh with Christ, therefore, the believer leaves all other relationships behind when we are joined to Christ—this is pictured in marriage. The relationship between husband and wife is superior to even the relationship between parents and children—the man leaves father and mother for his bride.

Ephesians 5: 31: For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. 32: This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33: Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife *see* that she reverence *her* husband.

So this beautiful picture between Christ and his bride, the church, set forth in marriage is why, Christ says, **“What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”**

III. THE CONDEMNATION—Matthew 19: 7: They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

Since the fall, since sin entered and death by sin, this is the way of vain, spiritually dead, religious men. Here stands God the Son—the great Lawgiver—Christ who is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes. Yet, the self-righteous set the law against the Lawgiver; they set their idea of righteousness against the Righteous One; they set the law against he who is the very fulfillment of the law for the believer. They are essentially calling Christ anti-nomian—accusing him of being against the law of Moses and are putting the law above the Lawgiver! Why? They are trying to justify themselves before God using the law—this is spiritual infidelity against Christ.

But when a sinner appeals to the law before God in order to justify his rebellion he always condemns himself—**Matthew 19: 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.**

Moses was not approving of divorce, but because of the hardness of their hearts, to help the wife, to prevent greater evils, to prevent the husband slandering his wife with unjust accusations or even murdering her, as a civil judge and lawgiver, Moses suffered them to put away their wives. The way Moses ordered it to be done made it less appealing to the husband in many ways. It was more disgraceful for the husband than the bride. (Deut 24: 1-4)—still in hardness of heart they put away their wives!

The Lord said, **“but from the beginning it was not so.”** Lawfulness before God is not measured by the toleration of civil government nor from traditions of men but from God’s law.

Application: Never appeal to the law to justify yourself before God. By their doing so, Christ condemned them for their own hard-heartedness.

Romans 3: 19: Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20: Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

IV. GOD’S GRACE—Matthew 19: 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.

“Fornication” includes all sexual infidelity—this is the exception our Savior gives here for divorce. The man who divorces his wife for other reasons, and marries another, commits adultery; his new wife commits adultery; and the man who marries her which is put away, also commits adultery because in God’s eyes the wife he put away is still his wife.

Be sure to get this: Christ is not teaching that men and women should get a divorce if one or the other commits sexual infidelity. He is merely teaching that in such cases it is lawful to do so. The better way is to forgive. Our Lord had just spoken of forgiving without limit. Brethren, has God not forgiven us for the sake of Christ our Redeemer.

Under the old covenant, the Jews forsook their marriage covenant with their wives to marry wives in heathen nations. That was a sign of their forsaking the greater, spiritual marriage covenant between them and God. And it shows us a picture of how we, God's elect, broke the marriage covenant with Christ when we sinned in Adam.

Malachi 2: 10: Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?

Marriage pictures the marriage covenant between Christ and his bride. They put away that covenant which God made with their fathers; they divorced themselves from that covenant made with their fathers. That is what all God's elect did when we sinned in Adam.

Malachi 2: 11: Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god.

Not only did we forsake the marriage covenant in Adam, we married the daughter of a strange god—the strange god of self, of sin, of self-righteousness.

Malachi 2: 12: The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the LORD of hosts.

God will by no means clear the guilty whether it be the least to greatest, religious and otherwise—all shall be cut off

Malachi 2: 13: And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth *it* with good will at your hand.

Like them, we remained religious, but it was a strange wife. While dead in sins, we were married to the strange god of vain self-made religion.

Malachi 2: 14: Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet *is* she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.

In God's eye the wife they put away was still their wife. Thankfully, though we played the harlot against Christ—in God's eye, his elect were still married to Christ by his everlasting covenant of grace.

Malachi 2: 15: And did not he make one?

In the beginning he made Adam one wife. Likewise, he made Christ one bride, the church, his elect

Malachi 2: 15:... Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed.

God had power to make as many wives for Adam as he chose. But God chose one bride that he might seek legitimate children, a godly seed. God made one bride for Christ that he might seek a godly seed—children washed from our sins, born of his incorruptible seed. And spiritually, we must stay true to the gospel of Christ if the church, the bride, would bear godly seed by Christ our Husband, by the word of incorruptible Seed.

Malachi 2: 15: Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.

This regards not only your earthly wife but that everlasting marriage covenant of grace in Christ. Do not deal treacherously and turn from Christ for any other.

Malachi 2: 16: For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for *one* covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

God does not put away. And he hates putting away by others. Because in the same way that a sinner covers the divorce of his first wife with another wife—coverth violence with his garment—spiritually sinners who forsake Christ try to cover their sins by taking the idolatrous bride of vain religion as Judah had done, as we had done. But God hates putting away. Yet, he said the man who does this shall be cut. How can God cut us off but not put us away. He cut off his Son in place of his elect rather than putting away his bride

God shows us what a faithful husband Christ is using Gomer and Hosea. We played the harlot against Christ our Husband like Gomer did Hosea. Therefore, we went many days without Christ

Hosea 3: 4: For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim:

- We were without Christ our King and Prince
- Without Christ the sacrifice for our sins
- Without Christ's image in our inward man
- Without Christ the Ephod and Teraphim—the glorious presence of Christ our High Priest

But though we played the harlot, God had determined our end from the beginning.

Hosea 3: 5: Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.

But what about our sin? God must cut us off to be just. What was the word of the LORD to Gomer's husband, Hosea? It was the same as God's word to his Son, Christ our Substitute:

Hosea 3:1: Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, **yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel**, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine.

God the Father chose his elect to be a bride for his Son. Christ loved us even when we were the adulteress. He came and laid down his life for us, **according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel**,

Under Moses law, the bride who was put away could never be the first husbands again—she was defiled. But listen to our gracious God.

Jeremiah 3:1: They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD....12: Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever. 13: Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD. 14: Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: 15: And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.

So Christ made that gospel proclamation effectual in our hearts and called us to himself saying,

Hosea 3: 3: Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee.

Brethren, it would have been lawful for God to put us away—even as Christ says it is lawful to put away a spouse for fornication. Yet, God forgave us of all our infidelity toward him in Christ our faithful, unchanging, unchangeable, loving Husband. So rather than putting away a spouse for fornication, rather than rejecting brethren who have divorced a spouse, rather than putting them away, God says to you and I, believer,

Ephesians 4: 31: Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

You say, "It would be hard to forgive my spouse of fornication." Indeed! So believer, now you know something of the greatness of God's forgiveness toward adulterers like us. So believer, submit yourself to Christ our Husband with all faithfulness. Wives, as the church is subject to Christ, submit yourselves to your husbands, as unto the Lord. Husbands love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it. And let us all, forgive one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Amen!