

## Jesus Taught About the Plan of God for Marriage

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand that God will discipline them, in love, if they have an unforgiving heart toward another person. The Pharisees certainly demonstrated their unbelief, as well as the hardness in their hearts, by the question they asked Jesus in the next chapter.

Jesus taught His disciples about forgiveness. Then, Jesus and the disciples moved to another area. Matthew 19:1-6 says, “Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, *that* He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there. The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for *just* any reason?’ And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.’” Here, we see that Jesus moved to the area east of the Jordan River but in the region of Judea. There, great crowds came to Jesus and brought many to Him to be healed.

Since this area was close to Jerusalem, the Pharisees came again to test Jesus with questions. Their first question was to try to trap Jesus, but it was also a subject that was being debated by the Pharisees, because two different rabbis had very different opinions. As a result, the Pharisees asked Jesus, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for *just* any reason?” One rabbi, by the name of Shammai, taught that the only reason a man could divorce his wife was if she was guilty of sexual immorality. A different rabbi, by the name of Hillel, permitted a man to divorce his wife for any reason. This question was being debated by the Pharisees because some followed the teaching of Shammai and some followed the teaching of Hillel. The Pharisees thought that whatever answer Jesus gave, the other group could say Jesus was wrong, so it was a trap to test Him.

Jesus first quoted a statement from the book of Malachi and then from the book of Genesis. Malachi 2:14-15 says, “Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make *them* one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.” Malachi had said that they were dealing treacherously with the wife of their youth. Then, Jesus quoted Genesis 2:24 which says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” This verse established God’s standard for all marriages because Adam and Eve had no parents to leave. Then, Jesus explained the last phrase of that verse by saying in verse 6, “So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man

separate.” Here, we see that the desire of God did not include divorce because He is the One who has joined a couple together.

This led the Pharisees to ask a second question in Matthew 18:7-9, “They said to Him, ‘Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?’ He said to them, ‘Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted 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; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.’” Here, the Pharisees showed that they had totally twisted the Word of God to satisfy their own sinful desires. Moses actually wrote that a woman could not return to her first husband, if a second husband also divorced her. Moses never commanded divorce.

The instructions of Moses are given in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 where we read, “‘When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts *it* in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man’s *wife*, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts *it* in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, *then* her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that *is* an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you *as* an inheritance.” These verses make it clear that Moses never commanded divorce. The only command is “Her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that *is* an abomination before the LORD.” Then, Jesus explained why Moses allowed, but never commanded, divorce.

Jesus said, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.” Here, we see that Jesus had just exposed the sin of the Pharisees when He spoke of the hardness of their hearts. The word translated “hardness of heart” is only used three times in the New Testament. In Mark 10:5, it is the same event that is recorded here. Then, Mark 16:14 says, “Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.” In this case, Jesus rebuked His disciples for their unbelief and hardness of heart for not believing the witnesses of His resurrection.

The Jewish religious leaders showed this same unbelief and hardness of heart when the soldiers reported the resurrection of Jesus. Matthew 28:11-14 says, “Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, ‘Tell them, “His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.” And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and make you secure.’” The disciples repented of their hardness of heart when they saw Jesus. In contrast, the religious leaders never repented of their unbelief.

Jesus gave one reason why divorce was allowed (but not required). That was for sexual

immorality. That allowance was actually an act of mercy, because the penalty of the law for adultery or sexual immorality is given in Deuteronomy 22:22 where we read, “If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die—the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel.” Joseph was going to show this mercy to Mary when Matthew 1:19 says, “Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.” Christ gave the same allowance here that He had earlier given in Matthew 5:32, where we read, “But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”

The disciples then asked Jesus if it would be better then not to get married. Matthew 19:10-12 says, “His disciples said to Him, ‘If such is the case of the man with *his* wife, it is better not to marry.’ But He said to them, ‘All cannot accept this saying, but only *those* to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from *their* mother’s womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He who is able to accept *it*, let him accept *it*.’” We see that most of the disciples were married. 1 Corinthians 9:5 says, “Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as *do* also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?” However, we see three reasons given in these verses why a man might be a eunuch.

First, we see that a person might be a eunuch because he had been born without male sexual organs. Second, we see that some were made eunuchs by men. This meant that their sexual organs had been removed. This was done in many kingdoms if a king had a harem of women. The keeper of the harem would have his sexual organs removed, so that he could not have sexual relationships with the wives or concubines of the king. This was also done in some cases to other high government officials, for example, the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. Third, we see that there are those who make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the work of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 7:32-33 says, “But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please *his* wife.”

Paul knew that he was going to experience much suffering for the sake of the Lord. Ananias has been told in Acts 9:15-16, “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.’” Paul chose not to marry so that he could carry out the work that the Lord had for him, including the beatings, imprisonments, shipwrecks and other things. He wanted to be without care so that he could focus on the things of the Lord. He knew it would be very difficult to lead a wife as he experienced this suffering for the Lord. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that the Lord may lead them to a type of ministry that might make it very difficult for them to have a wife and family. We also want to help them understand and apply the will of God for a godly marriage. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand what Jesus taught about marriage.