

An Examination Of Matthew 19

Introduction. When the issue of divorce and remarriage is discussed, Matthew 19:9 immediately comes to mind. If any passage needs to be properly understood in a study of this type, it must be Matthew 19:9. Though other points and passages must come into view, this verse bears the main burden.

I. *The Context Of Matthew 19*

- A. The Pharisee's question (vs. 3).
 - 1. They probably had in mind Deuteronomy 24:1-4.
 - 2. The majority of the Jews held the position of Rabbi Hillel which allowed for divorce for any cause.
- B. The answer of Jesus points to God's law at the beginning (vss. 4-6).
 - 1. God created one man for one woman (Genesis 1:27).
 - 2. There are no alternatives just in case the first marriage does not work out!
- C. Mates must cleave to each other (vs. 5).
 - 1. "Cleave" means "to join fast together, to glue, cement."
 - 2. Because of this Genesis 2:24 should apply, not Deuteronomy 24.
- D. A man and his wife are one flesh (vs. 6).
 - 1. This means they are one in mind, spirit, goals, will, and emotion.
 - 2. God has joined man and woman together in marriage. "Joined" is only used here and in Mark 10:9. It means "to fasten in one yoke, yoke together." When God has bound a man and wife together, man has no right to put his mate away for any cause.
 - 3. Can a man divorce his wife for any reason? No. There are four reasons Jesus says why divorce should not occur:
 - a) God created one man for one woman.
 - b) Husbands and wives are to cleave to one another.
 - c) Husbands and wives are to become one flesh.
 - d) What God joined together, let not man separate.
- E. Pharisees ask about Moses and the bill of divorcement (vs. 7).
 - 1. They wanted to put Christ in conflict with Moses.
 - 2. By citing Deuteronomy 24:1-4, they think this is just another way to discredit Him since reverence for Moses was second only to God. However, they had perverted Moses by speaking of divorcement as a command.
- F. Moses' instruction (vs. 8).
 - 1. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 stated that if man marry and find "some unclean thing," then he may give his wife a bill of divorcement and she may go and be another man's wife. But she can never be married to the first husband again.

- a) Although the meaning of "some unclean thing" is difficult to determine, it can be safely determined that it does not mean adultery in this passage.
 - b) The adulterer or adulteress would be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:22). In Deuteronomy 24:1-4, she could go and be another man's wife.
 - c) When Joseph found Mary with child, he considered putting her away secretly (Matthew 1:19).
 - (1) If "some unclean thing" always meant fornication, then when Joseph intended to divorce her, he was making a public example out of her.
 - (2) The fact that "some unclean thing" did not inherently mean fornication meant Joseph was not willing to publicly charge Mary with fornication.
 - (3) To have made her a public example would have meant charges of adultery would be brought against her and she would be stoned to death.
2. This passage simply prohibits the remarriage of the put away woman to her first husband. There was no sign of God's approval of divorce or remarriage to second husband. Furthermore, there was nothing in the passage to encourage the divorce. In fact, it was there to discourage divorce and protect the woman. If the man had to give her a bill of divorcement and could not take her back, this might cause him to think before acting. To take her back would pollute the land (Jeremiah 3:1).
- a) The NKJV and NASB clarify this point. The KJV seems to indicate that God approves of a man putting away his wife for uncleanness and her remarriage to the second man.
 - b) However, the NKJV and the NASB simply states it as an action the man does, rather than saying he may do it. Neither translation indicates that God approves of the man putting away his wife or her remarrying the second man.
- G. Jesus said Moses "suffered" (vs. 8).
- 1. This means that God tolerated an already common practice. But nowhere did He say God approved of divorce (Malachi 2:16).
 - 2. Throughout Old Testament God tolerated actions of which He did not approve (i.e., polygamy).
- H. Jesus teaches His law (vs. 9).
- 1. Jesus was not explaining the real meaning of the law of Moses in contrast to what the Jewish teachers had corrupted it to mean (Matthew 5:31-32).
 - 2. He was saying that while different reasons for divorce had been allowed under the law of Moses, under His law only one cause was

allowable for divorce and remarriage: fornication. Fornication is a violation of Genesis 2:24.

II. ***Instructions To The Different Parties***

- A. The Lord's instructions with regard to the man (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18).
 - 1. The man who divorces his wife for some other cause than fornication, does not have a right to remarry.
 - 2. If he does, he commits adultery.
- B. The Lord's instructions with regard to the woman. It is the same as for the man but is mentioned only in Mark's account (Mark 10:11-12).
 - 1. The woman who divorces her husband for some cause other than fornication does not have a right to remarry.
 - 2. If she does, she commits adultery (Romans 7:2-3).
- C. The Lord's instructions regarding the dismissed party -- the innocent party who is dismissed -- mentioned in two accounts (Matthew 5:32; Mark 10:11). We have two reasons why a man should not divorce his wife, except for fornication, and marry another.
 - 1. "Caused her to commit adultery."
 - a) If he divorced his wife for other than the scriptural cause, he opens his wife to great temptation to sin (1 Corinthians 7:8-9). Think of the jeopardy a man puts a woman in, when she married because she could not contain, and the man breaks the tie for other than the scriptural reason in divorce.
 - b) If she seeks to satisfy her desires outside of marriage, she sins, or if she marries again, she sins. Jesus is showing that it is wrong for a man to open his wife to such jeopardy.
 - 2. "Committeth adultery against her."
 - a) This shows the seriousness of the sin of adultery. He not only sins against God, but against his wife, and to obtain forgiveness, he must confess his sin to both.
 - b) Some think that as long as they can hide their unfaithfulness, everything is all right; on the contrary, they have sinned against their companion, and if they want to be saved eternally, they must ask for forgiveness.
- D. The Lord's teaching concerning the third party -- mentioned in three passages (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Luke 16:18).
 - 1. The third party who either marries one who was divorced without scriptural grounds, or marries one who was divorced because of guilt of fornication, commits adultery.
 - 2. This definitively proves that there are consequences for everyone involved in an adulterous relationship.
- E. The Lord's instructions regarding the guilty party -- the one who is

guilty of committing adultery against his married companion.

1. The guilty party does not have a right to remarry as seen in the expression, "... Whoso marrieth her that is put away doth commit adultery."
2. We have already seen that the only instance in which one is free to remarry is when he divorces his companion because of fornication. The guilty party does not fit this one instance.

III. ***An Application Of The Text***

A. Divorce.

1. Jesus does not command or require divorce, but it is permitted with approval. There are many reasons why one might obtain a divorce.
2. However, Jesus allowed only one cause: fornication, whether there will be any remarriage or not.

B. Remarriage.

1. In the case of remarriage after divorce, the blanket rule is that it is adultery. The one exception is when one puts away his or her mate for fornication.
2. If the one who puts away remarries, it is adultery if the divorce was for some cause other than fornication. It is not adultery if the divorce was for fornication. If the put away one remarries, it is adultery whatever the cause, fornication or not.
3. Obviously, when the put away one (whether for fornication or another reason) remarries, it is adultery. When no fornication is involved, remarriage for both partners is adultery. It does not matter which remarries first, both remarriages are adulterous.

Conclusion. Those who study of the law of God and find themselves in an adulterous marriage, should have sympathy extended to them. But they should never allow their physical relationship to become more important than their desire to please God and go to heaven. All relationships in this life are soon over. If one is foolish and sells their eternal inheritance for a cheap price, they will bear the punishment for an eternity (Hebrews 12:15-16).

I am deeply indebted to Donnie Rader for this material.