



Kingdom Preparation

The Gifts of Marriage and Singleness

Matthew 19:1-12

How to Prepare

Begin preparing by reading the full passage a few times. Then answer the questions for yourself. Then think about how your Small Group might answer them. Try re-wording the questions to fit you and your Small Group. Don't feel tied down to the discussion guide, just be sure to discuss the main point of the text in your conversations.

Resources-

<https://www.gotquestions.org/what-God-has-joined-together.html>

<https://learn.ligonier.org/sermons/mark-marriage-and-divorce>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/marriage-is-not-about-me>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/is-my-singleness-a-gift>

Sermon Outline:

Matthew 19:1-12

1. God Designed Marriage. Vv. 1-6
2. Sin Distorts Marriage. Vv. 7-9
3. Grace Delivers Marriage. Vv. 10-12

Matthew 19:1-12

Concerning Divorce

- 1 When Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan;
- 2 and large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there.
- 3 Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?"
- 4 And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female,
- 5 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'?
- 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."
- 7 They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?"
- 8 He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.
- 9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."
- 10 The disciples said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry."
- 11 But He said to them, "Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given.
- 12 For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it."

Discussion Questions

Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 19:1-12.

INTRODUCTION

Here is a question or two to help introduce the topic and jump-start discussion.

1. Why do so many people find misery in their relationship status? How does the gospel give us hope no matter our relationship status?

UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION

These questions should help your Small Group dig deeper into the text and then apply it to your lives today.

I. God Designed Marriage. Vv. 1-6

2. What were the Pharisees asking Jesus about, and what was the motive behind their question? How does Jesus answer the Pharisees, and what can we learn about responding to people from His response?

3. What was the majority opinion about divorce and remarriage in their day, and how does that compare to the majority opinion today? How does Jesus' answer in vv. 4-6 correct the modern idea that marriage is simply a social construct that we can change?

4. Why is it significant that marriage is a covenant between a man, a woman, and God? How does understanding His authority over marriage change how we think about it?

II. Sin Distorts Marriage. Vv. 7-9

5. Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4. What were the Pharisees missing in their understanding of this text? How did this text actually guard against divorce rather than promote it?

6. What does Jesus point to in v. 8 as the problem that causes the reality of divorce? How does His answer teach us that divorce is always either caused by, or an act of, at least one party sinning?

7. How does sin (even in the "small" things) lead people to desire divorce in their marriage? How can we identify when we are making a relationship self-serving rather than gospel-centered, and why is it necessary to weed that out even in the "small" things?

III. Grace Delivers Marriage. Vv. 10-12

8. What does the disciples' response in v. 10 reveal about their predisposition toward marriage? How is their attitude similar to people's attitude about marriage today?

9. What does Jesus' response to the disciples show about both marriage and singleness? How does the gospel free us from feeling like marriage is a "ball and chain"? Likewise, how does the gospel free us from feeling like our singleness is torture?

10. Why is it important to receive either marriage or celibate singleness as a gift of God's grace, and what are some practical ways to live that out?

Commentary (from ESV Study Bible)

Matt. 19:1 Judea beyond the Jordan. Most likely Perea, the area just east of the Jordan River between Samaria and the Decapolis, whose population was largely Jewish.

Matt. 19:2 large crowds followed him. Jesus' fame has quickly spread, due to his healing ministry in Galilee.

Matt. 19:3 Pharisees . . . tested him. See note on 3:7. The religious leaders try to get Jesus to incriminate himself through misinterpreting the law. divorce. There was a significant debate between Pharisaical parties on the correct interpretation of Moses' divorce regulations (Deut. 24:1), as noted in this excerpt from the Mishnah, Gittin 9.10: "The school of Shammai says: A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her. . . . And the school of Hillel says: [He may divorce her] even if she spoiled a dish for him. . . . Rabbi Akiba says, [he may divorce her] even if he found another fairer than she" (see Mishnah, Gittin 9 for an example of a Jewish certificate of divorce and the terms required for remarriage; see also Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 4.253 for the phrase "whatsoever cause").

Matt. 19:4–5 He who created them . . . said is a strong affirmation of the divine inspiration of the OT Scriptures, because Jesus goes on to quote words from Genesis that are not attributed to any speaker ("Therefore a man . . ." cf. Gen. 2:24) and attributes those words to God.

Matt. 19:6 What . . . God has joined together implies that marriage is not merely a human agreement but a relationship in which God changes the status of a man and a woman from being single (they are no longer two) to being married (one flesh). From the moment they are married, they are unified in a mysterious way that belongs to no other human relationship, having all the God-given rights and responsibilities of marriage that they did not have before. Being "one flesh" includes the sexual union of a husband and wife (see Gen. 2:24), but it is more than that because it means that they have left their parents' household ("a man shall leave his father and his mother," Gen. 2:24) and have established a new family, such that their primary human loyalty is now to each other, before anyone else. let not man separate. Jesus avoids the Pharisaic argument about reasons for divorce and goes back to the beginning of creation to demonstrate God's intention for the institution of marriage. It is to be a permanent bond between a man and a woman that joins them into one new union that is consecrated by physical intercourse (Gen. 2:24).

Matt. 19:8 Because of your hardness of heart should not be understood to mean that only "hard-hearted" people would ever initiate a divorce. Rather, it means, "because there was hard-hearted rebellion against God among you, leading to serious defilement of marriages." The presence of sin in the

Commentary (from ESV Study Bible)

community meant that some marriages would be seriously defiled and irretrievably damaged, and God therefore provided divorce as a solution in those cases. Moses allowed you to divorce. The Pharisees had asked why Moses commanded divorce (v. 7), but Jesus corrects them, showing that divorce is not what God intended from the beginning, and that even when it is allowed, it is permitted only on very specific grounds but never required. See note on Deut. 24:1–4. From the beginning it was not so points back to God's original intent that marriage would be lifelong.

Matt. 19:9 Every phrase in this verse is important for understanding Jesus' teaching on divorce. whoever divorces his wife. "Divorces" is Greek *apoluō*, which always means "divorce" in contexts concerning marriage. Some commentators have claimed that *apoluō* means "separates from, sends away" in this verse (implying separation but not divorce), but this is not persuasive because (a) this word has not been shown to include the sense of "separate" in any other contexts concerning marriage and (b) the same word clearly means "divorce" in the Pharisees' question in v. 3 (the current dispute among Jewish rabbis was about divorce, not separation), and therefore it should be understood to have the same meaning in Jesus' response to their question in vv. 8 and 9. except for sexual immorality (Gk. *porneia*). (1) This implies that divorce and remarriage on the grounds of sexual immorality are not prohibited and thus do not constitute adultery. This is the one exception Jesus makes to the requirement that marriage be lifelong, for sexual immorality grievously defiles and indeed corrupts the "one flesh" union (v. 5). (2) The parallel passages in Mark 10:11–12 and Luke 16:18 omit "except for sexual immorality," but that was probably because everyone, whatever their position in Jewish disputes over divorce (see note on Matt. 19:3), assumed that divorce was allowed in the case of adultery (i.e., the question of divorce because of adultery was not at issue in the immediate context in Mark 10 and Luke 16). But Matthew includes this fuller account of Jesus' words, with the exception clause, perhaps to prevent any possible misunderstanding in other contexts, and perhaps to explicitly situate Jesus' teaching within the context of the Jewish debates, for the benefit of his Jewish-Christian audience. (Also note that Matthew sometimes includes clarifying exceptions not included by Mark and Luke; e.g., Mark 8:12 quotes Jesus saying "no sign will be given to this generation," whereas Matt. 16:4 says "no sign will be given to [this generation] except the sign of Jonah.") (3) Some have claimed that *porneia* in this context refers to a very narrow, specific kind of sexual immorality, either sexual relations among close relatives or sexual immorality discovered during the betrothal period. Those who hold this position then argue that divorce in any other case is always prohibited, or else if divorce is allowed, remarriage is never allowed. But *porneia* had a broader range of meaning in ordinary usage, referring to any sexual intercourse that was contrary to the moral standards of Scripture, and nothing in this context would indicate that this should be understood in such a restricted sense (see



Commentary (from ESV Study Bible)

note on 5:31–32). and marries another, commits adultery. (1) If a divorce is obtained for any reason other than (“except for”) sexual immorality, then the second marriage begins with adultery. Jesus is prohibiting divorce for the many trivial reasons that were used so frequently in the first century, leading to widespread injustice, especially for women whose husbands suddenly divorced them. (2) “And marries another” implies that the second marriage, though it begins with adultery, is still a marriage. Once a second marriage has occurred, it would be further sin to break it up. The second marriage should not be thought of as continually living in adultery, for the man and woman are now married to each other, not to anyone else. (3) If the exception (“sexual immorality”) occurs, then the implication is that remarriage to “another” does not constitute adultery and is therefore permissible. (4) Divorce, it must be remembered, is permitted but not required in the case of sexual immorality. Since God’s intention is that marriage should be for life (19:4–8), this provides good reason to make every reasonable effort to achieve restoration and forgiveness in marriage before taking steps to dissolve a marriage through divorce. This makes Jesus’ teaching fundamentally different from all of first-century Judaism, which required divorce in the case of adultery. (On the question of divorce and desertion, see 1 Cor. 7:15 and note.)

Matt. 19:10–12 After hearing Jesus nullify most of the currently popular grounds for divorce, the disciples overreact and say, it is better not to marry (than to run the risk of a lifelong unhappy marriage). This saying is best understood as referring to that statement (“it is better not to marry”). Jesus explains that what they have said is true, but only for those to whom it is given, namely, for eunuchs. This would include those without the capacity for sexual relations, either through a birth defect or castration, and those who have chosen a life of abstinence. Celibacy is an acceptable alternative to marriage (cf. 1 Cor. 7:6–9; and note on 1 Cor. 7:6–7).