

Lesson 37 Matthew 19 1-12 (10) Jesus teaches on the bonds matrimony and service to God.

The Question

The Pharisees put the question, "Can a man put away his wife for any cause?" The context was a running dispute between the schools of Hillel and Shammai over the "small book or papyrus of divorce" for "some uncleanness" in Deuteronomy 24.1-2. In practice since Jesus' time divorce amongst the Jews has been known to have been contrived for unsatisfactory cooking and other frivolous reasons and the case of Herod who promoted divorce for a "better looking" woman rendered this a burning issue. Such is the power of the man in the Muslim household that by three claps of the hands he may legally dismiss his wife.

The Answer

Jesus made a range of points. First, he emphasised the creation ordinance in Genesis 2.24 is fundamental- "marriage is the union of one man and one woman"(in the sight of God). The permanence of marriage is likened to the bonding of two in one flesh. Second, by their own sexual act the man and woman are "damasked" or "welded" together (Greek προσκολλω) Third, they are "yoked" together (Greek συνζευγωμι) by God in a family bond of love and work so that just as animals ploughing together are kept in the same field they should not be driven apart to different locations. Fourth in a case where there is no unfaithfulness (where the man would not forgive his spouse in gentleness) a certificate of legal divorce was issued by Moses) allowing the woman to re-marry. Fifth, before the eyes of God where unfaithfulness leads to remarriage the second union is deemed adulterous (19.10).

The response

It is not to be thought strange that the LORD should not yield to all-comers in His glorious purpose and principle. Jesus disciples recognised Jesus' teaching to be a reaffirmation of marriage as originally intended. Jesus sought to do away with divorce by creating in the man a "heart of compassion" but history has proceeded on the downgrade and both men and women have allowed themselves to be governed by "hearts of lust and hardness." The disciples responded, "If this is the ground of fault and remonstrance with respect to a man with a wife it is not enduring or possible to indulge or expedient to marry into this once for all state!(Greek γαμεσαι)

Jesus on singleness

Jesus replied classically. Not all can "make room for another" (in this large hearted way); not all can "move forward as this oracle says" but those to whom it is given. In other words God gives grace for such loving marriages as He desires. For there are eunuchs who never marry and they are born without power to father. There are persons who have been made eunuchs by monarchs and there are others who choose not to marry to give themselves wholly to the kingdom of heaven. Let him who is able to make room for the King (of kings) in his devout commitment proceed with it. Clearly this latter commitment is no less strenuous-indeed more so.

Paul's teaching and Moses' response to distress

In 1Corinthians 7.39 and in 1 Thess 5.14 it is allowed that the Christian woman receives permission to re-marry where she is not at fault when the husband marries another. In Romans 7 1-3 it is not permitted to the wife to dissolve her marriage without reason of a husband's moral misconduct involving their union. Moses divorce at root derived from "hardness of heart". This today might well assimilate to our "incompatibility" which at root is such dysfunctionality as results in no communication assault and "battered wives"

From Paper to practice



- 1 What is the creation ordinance on marriage?
- 2 On what single pretext would Jesus countenance divorce?
- 3 Was Moses' bill wider in what it permitted than Jesus teaching?
- 4 Did Paul follow Moses or Jesus in his teaching?