

Matthew 19; Whats the question/whats the response?

By WmTipton

Here is the account of Jesus speaking with the pharisees in Matthew.

This account is pretty much identical to Mark 10, except that the words "for every cause" and "except for fornication" are in this account and do not appear in Marks account of this story.

Firstly lets read it thru, then we'll break it down and see what is being discussed.

"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? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, 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? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? 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. 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.

His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

(Mat 19:3-12 KJV)

"The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him,"

As they had been with John, the Pharisees were trying anything they could to incite the masses against Jesus. They would ask Him questions hoping His answer would cause the mobs to turn against Him and preferably kill Him. We see right from the start that this is not a sincere desire to learn but instead is a trap for Jesus.

"and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?"

A key component here that shows us what they believed is the words 'Is it LAWFUL...'.

This tells us that they are asking Jesus if the LAW endorsed this putting away 'for EVERY cause'.

In asking this and showing us what they believed, its easily discerned that they believe that Moses by the Law in Deut 24 was actually ENDORSING putting away for these trivial reasons they brought against their wives.

There are two main schools of thought on the passage in Deut 24:1-4.

Those of Shammai thought that it meant ONLY for an actual "unclean" act, and surely nothing less than an actual covenant breaking act committed by the wife gave a man the right to put her away.

Then there was the school of Hillel.

These believed that the man only needed to find some small imperfection in her..such as smelly breath or burning his breakfast....."for any cause" she could be put away.

What is VERY obvious here is that Jesus is being confronted by those of Hillel.... the pharisees of Shammai did not believe in divorce "for EVERY cause" only for legitimately breaking the marriage covenant, only those of Hillel would have asked our Lord this question in this manner.

Matthews account sheds much light on the entire conversation that Marks account neglects.

Another key point is, again, that they were 'tempting Him'.

This question was not asked in sincerity to find truth, but instead was their attempt at cornering Jesus into hopefully inciting the Hebrew masses against Him for supposedly defying the law of Moses.

"And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, 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? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"

Jesus response shows absolutely here that we ARE discussing the covenant of marriage...not premarriage and not "engagement" as we have it today.

He is clearly discussing a union that GOD Himself has joined together... that is shown conclusively.

He states that this man and woman instead of being two, become "one flesh" (see 1 Corinth. 6:16 as well on this issue for more context). That God has joined them together in HIS union and let no man (or woman obviously) put asunder.... or "separate".

Jesus is discussing the UNION of marriage, that is a fact from the text given.

Contrary to the words of marriage wrecking heretics, we know that Jesus is NOT saying that man CANNOT put asunder as that view would make Paul a lying heretic himself.

See >>> ["Let not man Put Asunder" vs "let the unbeliever depart"](#)

"They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?"

The Pharisees invoke the words of Moses Himself, most likely hoping to help incite the mob at this point.

They ask Him, can we divorce for any reason, a luxury the Jews had grown quite used to. Jesus response seems to be just what they're looking for, something they can anger the mob with....so they say to Him "hey, MOSES says we can do it".... trying to show that He is defying the law of Moses.

My thoughts are that they already had heard something on His views on marriage and knew to try this against Him. But they must not have heard all the details on the matter or they'd have known He wasn't going against Moses at all since Moses had not given the writ of divorce to PERMIT putting away, but instead it was given to REGULATE what was already going on.

"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"

Here is a key point that MANY abuse.

They try to make it like ALL divorce is because of hardheartedness, but Jesus never states that at all.

And a study of the history of the Jews and even this brief passage makes it clear.

Remember what the Pharisees had just asked Jesus? "can we put away a wife FOR EVERY CAUSE" ?

THAT is the hardheartedness Jesus is talking about. He is speaking to men who were putting away their wives for any reason they could come up with....leaving her to be destitute, without means to support herself...just casting an innocent wife out for no reason...THAT is their 'treachery'...

What Moses had dealt with was worse, but the same hardheartedness fueled it before as well.

The reason Moses had permitted them to put away their wives without her breaking the covenant was because these horrible Jewish men would beat her or even kill her to be rid of her.

So even before Deut 24 was penned, men were unjustly, savagely ridding themselves of an unwanted wife.

For those who disbelieve me, please turn on your news or open a paper.... even today these brute beasts are tormenting their innocent wives.

Jesus is right when He says it was because of hardness of heart that Moses had permitted them to just put her away.

Moses was trying to protect her from being hurt, abused or even killed at the hands of these monstrous men like we see even today and thus permitted them to put her away without just cause....then later REGULATED this allowance of easily putting her away by giving Deut 24:1-4 in a further attempt to protect her from him.

Jesus never states, nor implies, that ALL divorce by a man is over his hard heart.

He was asked a DIRECT question by men trying to set Him up....tempting Him....and He gave them a clear response....except for fornication...unless she ACTUALLY breaches the covenant you commit adultery when you cast her out and remarry another.

The man who has been cheated on for years and finally deserted, who treated his wife like a queen and is completely devastated by her leaving can merely end up filing divorce over broken heartedness instead when he realizes she isnt coming back or going to change her ways.

This is exactly how our God felt about Israel and having to put a covenant away with her over her continued whoredoms.

"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."

Jesus has explained that from the beginning what the pharisees were permitted to do was not the way God intended. From the beginning it was not so. From the beginning God intended the man to love and cherish his sweet Eve-like wife as a symbol of our union to Him and to Christ. From the beginning a man could not just feel like he wanted to be rid of his wife for whatever cause and just cast her out. From the beginning marriage was for life.

Jesus says clearly ONLY for actually breaking the marriage covenant can she be put away without the man sinning against her. If she doesnt actually break the covenant, then to put her away and remarry is to commit adultery against her (see Mark 10 "against her") .

Where many mess this whole thing up is in believing that God CATERED to sin in the Old covenant by believing that Deut 24:1-4 is a 'permission' to divorce, and so then believe that God CHANGED His mind when Jesus came, which is preposterous.

PUTting away without just cause was wrong then just as it is wrong now.

God tried to fix it during Moses time, and thru the prophets, and then by His Sons own words.

And mankind has managed to abuse and pervert the INTENT of His word each time.

Deut 24:1-4 was never meant as a 'permission' to divorce for some ambiguous 'uncleanness'.

It was instead given to REGULATE and thus hopefully EXTIRPATE these frivolous casting away of a spouse.

To say otherwise is literally to ACCUSE GOD of CATERING to mans SIN !

As we have seen already, Jesus IS discussing a MARRIAGE with the pharisees.

Not some fantasy engagement that as that would make the entire discussion void of all meaning altogether. ONLY if they are discussing a lawfully binding, permanent marriage does the passage even make any sense at all....especially considering the pharisees bringing up Moses words in Deut 24:1-4...the passage that speaks of a bill of DIVORCE.

This accusation does not, as some supposed, create any 'state' of ongoing adultery. Jesus is simply declaring that a crime is indeed occurring and showing the man that his sin is so great that even when his innocent wife remarries, as at that point in time she pretty much would have had to to survive, that she also commits adultery against that marriage cast away for no just cause as does the man who marries her.

Note firstly that Christ does not ever condemn the innocent, also notice that He does not say that this woman is merely committing adultery with some other man, but shows plainly that she is marrying another.

We know our Lord does not condemn the innocent, that simply is not in His nature. For Him to damn this wife who has done no wrong would be out of character for Him to do, so we conclude that His condemnation is directed at this man who has put this marriage away for no just cause.

"His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry."

Jesus disciples are Jews. The SAME Jews who knew that "for any cause" divorce was permitted.

They had grown just as used to the idea, being Jews, that they could end a marriage easily *IF* they found out that they didnt like a wife for whatever reason, as the rest of the Jews had done.

Jesus has just shown these men who had centuries of easy divorce that NO...you cannot keep doing this . ONLY for actually breaking the covenant can she be put away. Just as Moses had tried to discourage them from their callous treatment of an innocent wife, Jesus is confirming that they must stop this behavior of casting out a wife without just cause.

Imagine today a man really is disgusted with his wife. She doesnt cook like he wants her to and wont give him sex in the depraved manner he wants and shes put on a few pounds. Under the Mosiac economy which permitted 'for any

cause" divorce as interpreted by many, the man could just send her packing with her bill of divorce. But Jesus says NO.... ONLY if she actually breaks the covenant can you put her away.

In all actuality, however, the writ wasn't given to 'permit' putting away. That was already going on when the writ was given. It was given to regulate...to restrict...this putting away, if that were possible.

His disciples were used to the idea of "for any cause", that way if she did start to become annoying to him he could be rid of her. But with Jesus' words it wasn't that easy. In truth, it IS better not to marry, as they said, rather than to end up stuck with a wife you're miserable with (most likely over your hardheartedness to begin with)

"But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."

Jesus' response shows that there aren't many men who CAN go without marrying. We see more men and women who cannot stay celibate than those who can. Even God Himself says to us, "it is not good for man to be alone"

Jesus shows indeed, that *IF* one CAN accept it, it is MUCH better to be as a eunuch and never marry. Some are this way by birth and some have decided to remain unmarried for the kingdom's work... but Jesus has shown that "all men cannot" receive this saying that "it is not good to marry"...only to whom it is given... those who have the ability. Most likely given by God Himself.