

GODLY MARRIAGE AND BLESSED CHILDREN

Matthew 19:1-15

Key Verse: 19:6

“So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

Verse 1 begins, “When Jesus had finished saying these things....” This is a repeated phrase in Matthew’s gospel that delineates the end of one of Jesus’ five major discourses (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). Jesus had just finished the fourth discourse, commonly called the “community discourse,” in which he taught his disciples how to form a Christian community in which he can dwell. Jesus taught us to humble ourselves so that we can love and serve one another. Jesus taught us God’s heart for one lost person. God is not willing that even one of his little ones be lost. Jesus taught us to deal with sin seriously in our own lives and in the church of God. Most of all, Jesus taught us to live by his grace as forgiven sinners. Our sin deserved everlasting condemnation in hell. But Jesus died on a cross to pay the price of our sin and forgive us. Remembering this, we can forgive others endlessly until we all become holy saints who can dwell in the kingdom of heaven forever.

In today’s passage, the Pharisees approach Jesus and want to talk about divorce. But Jesus teaches them about godly marriage and blesses little children. Jesus restores God’s original purpose and blessing upon marriage and the family. So we must see marriage from God’s point of view. Let’s accept Jesus’ teaching and live blessed lives, raising many blessed children.

First, what God has joined together (1-6).

Jesus left Galilee for the last time. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, according to God's will, where he would suffer many things at the hands of the religious leaders and die on the cross for our sins. So he entered into the region of Judea. Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. Jesus made the lame walk, gave sight to the blind and bound up the broken hearted. People rejoiced over Jesus' healing and praised God. It was a wonderful time with good shepherd, Jesus.

Look at verse 3. "Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?'" These Pharisees did not come to find answers, they came to test Jesus. They wanted to draw Jesus into a trap and discredit him. To do so, they tried to make use of a controversy about divorce. This controversy was rooted in Deuteronomy 24:1. It says, "If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house...." The controversy centered on the definition of "something indecent." The conservative school under Rabbi Shammai defined something indecent as adultery. The liberal school under Rabbi Hillel widened the definition considerably. They said that if a wife spoke disrespectfully to the husband's parents in his presence, he could divorce her. They even said that if she burned his dinner, he could divorce her. This was divorce for "any and every reason." As might be expected, Hillel's view was more popular. It still seems more popular. Now there is a Hillel house near UIC, and one near DePaul, and one near Loyola, but I have never seen a Shammai house. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught that divorce for any reason, except marital unfaithfulness, was wrong (Mt 5:31-32). The Pharisees must have known this and hoped to exploit it politically.

More than that, they wanted to accuse Jesus of contradicting the law of Moses. How did Jesus answer?

Look at verses 4-6. “‘Haven’t you read,’ he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.’”

When Jesus said, “Haven’t you read?” he was rebuking the Pharisees for their poor Bible study. They wanted to talk about divorce, but they did not understand marriage. Jesus took them back to Genesis 1-2 to help them understand God’s purpose and intent in marriage. When we study the Bible, we must struggle to understand God’s mind and the subject as a whole, comprehensively. To pick out one or two words and to argue about their definition can lead us astray.

Let’s think about Jesus’ teaching from Genesis. First of all, the Creator made people male and female. Obviously, there is a difference between males and females. They are both human beings. They are both created in the image of God. But they are different physically, emotionally, genetically, and intellectually. God made them male and female. Therefore, a male should be a male and a female should be a female. These days there is some confusion about this. But it is God’s truth that he made male and female. A man should be a man, and a woman should be a woman. When King David blessed Solomon, he said to him, “Be strong and show yourself a man.” Especially, men should be strong, courageous and decisive in obeying the word of God and giving glory to God. Men should be fully responsible to provide for and protect their wives and children. Women should be

submissive, gentle and nurturing. They are the mothers of the universe. They must also be good shoppers and willing to do the dishes. When men play the role of men and women play the role of women their union has harmony and displays the fullness of the image of God.

Secondly, a man leaves his father and mother to establish a family. There are three vital events in life: birth, marriage and death. Birth and death belong to God. But marriage involves our freedom of choice. In order to marry, a man must make a decision to leave his father and mother and be united to his wife. So there is a saying, “Sons are sons as long as they live at home; but daughters are daughters for life.” There is a moment in each man’s life when he must step out in faith and start a family. He must leave the nurture of his parents and begin an independent life in obedience to God’s will. A man who is not willing to make this decision cannot marry, like the character in, “Failure to Launch.” In the context of Genesis, this decision is not just a decision to marry, but a decision to obey God’s calling and to take up God’s mission. When God calls him, a man must make a decision of faith to commit his life to God, to his mission, and to his wife. In this way God establishes the family. It is one man and one woman serving God for life.

Thirdly, the two will become one flesh. A man and a woman come from different backgrounds. They have different personalities. They may have different nationalities. Through marriage they begin the process of becoming one flesh. They must learn to live in harmony by understanding their differences and how to build up one another and work together. They must learn to function as one unit even though they are two persons. How can the two become one? It is by the love of God. When God is at the center of their relationship they can become one. So they must give priority to Bible study, prayer and spiritual fellowship. God is the

common denominator. God's love binds them. God's purpose defines them. God's wisdom guides them. God's hope sustains them. God's presence with them is their source of love, joy and strength. God makes the two into one. I saw an example last week. Steve Stasinis really wanted to go to Turkey to participate in the summer conference there. But since he had used all of his vacation days to prepare his conference message, he could not go. Then his wife, Amy, felt that if Steve could not go, she must go. So she made arrangements and will go to Turkey, representing Steve. The two are becoming one flesh.

Look at verse 6. "So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." When the two become one in the love of God, they are one. One is one. One cannot be divided. God works to make the two one. Anything that hinders the two becoming one hinders God's purpose. It is a sin against God. A man and woman in God do not even have a concept of divorce. When Jesus told this to the Pharisees he meant that their problem was far more serious than a legal matter of divorce. Their problem was that they left God out of their marriages and they left God out of their lives.

The Pharisees were religious leaders. But they were ungodly. They were like the people of Noah's time. Genesis 6:2 says, "...the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose." These marriages totally ignored God. They ignored spiritual reality; flesh was their criteria. It led to the total degeneration of mankind and grieved God deeply. What about us? American society has been badly influenced by pragmatism. Pragmatic people decide everything according to their personal benefit. In regard to marriage, they seek someone attractive and compatible with whom they can enjoy freedom and pleasure. They seek someone who brings gain to them, be it intellectual,

professional, or financial. As long as marriage is beneficial and pleasant, they are willing to be married. But if it is not, they reject marriage. They are most afraid of making a commitment that threatens their freedom and pleasure. Jesus is crying out to our generation to look up to God, and to see the real purpose and meaning of marriage. Jesus wants us to restore godly marriage and establish many blessed homes.

Dr. Samuel Lee gave a prayer topic to raise 10,000 house churches. Mother Barry defined them as Jesus-centered, mission-oriented house churches. For this we have prayed and labored. Since Dr. Lee went to be with the Lord in 2002, we have conducted 21 wedding ceremonies in the Chicago center. Many other house churches were established throughout the United States and the world. Just yesterday a new house church was established in New York between Mary Koh and Dr. Dogyun Kim. We must pray for these house churches to be blessed by God. They are the greatest testament to the living presence of God in our time. So many young people have been wounded by the divorce of their parents. They are skeptical about marriage. But when they see the beautiful house churches established by God that stand firm and become a blessing to others, they find new hope to establish godly families and to live for the glory of God.

For example, there is Dr. Joseph Schafer's house church. Dr. Schafer is a truly great man in our times. As a Ph.D. student at Harvard University, he drove back and forth between Boston and New York every weekend to attend the Sunday worship service. He was willing to pay a high price to live a holy life. His good influence encouraged many Americans. God blessed him abundantly. Now he is a tenured professor at Penn State University and a distinguished scholar. Still, his master passion is world mission and raising Jesus' disciples in our times. He spent

his sabbatical year in Australia, not because it was good for his career, but because there was an urgent need for spiritual leadership in the ministry there. He has been chosen to deliver the main message at the UBF Staff Conference next month. Most importantly, Dr. Schafer is a shepherd for his family. He cares for his wife Sharon so dearly. She is artistic, intellectual and sensitive. Dr. Schafer never hurts her. He always understands, cares for and loves her so dearly that she has blossomed in every way. During this summer, she spent six weeks in Chicago to help their son Joey attend a special education class for autistic children. She devoted herself to Joey wholeheartedly, while Dr. Schafer watched over their other three children. As a result, Joey's reading improved so much that he came up to his grade level. It was a miracle of love through a blessed house church. I am sure that if 10,000 Jesus-centered, mission-oriented house churches are raised in America, this nation will be changed into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Let' pray for this, and work hard for this. To unmarried people I say, trust God with your marriage and establish a godly family by faith.

Second, hard hearts lead to divorce (7-9).

Jesus' teaching about godly marriage was so beautiful and life-giving. But the Pharisees, whose hearts were hard, did not accept it. They looked for a way to trap Jesus. Look at verse 7. "‘Why then,’ they asked, ‘did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?’" They make it sound like Moses commanded divorce and that Jesus was contradicting Moses by teaching not to divorce. This kind of twisted conclusion comes when hard hearted people argue over the meaning of words instead of learning God's heart and doing what pleases him. How did Jesus answer?

Look at verses 8-9. “Jesus replied, ‘Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.’” Jesus put Moses’ teaching into context. It was not a command, but a concession to people who were hardened by a slave mentality. Actually, Moses did this to protect women. In his time, many men were hard hearted and abusive toward their wives. Often, they became like this because they had someone else in their hearts. Then they treated their wives with contempt, making them completely miserable. The abuse was physical, verbal and emotional. Moses grieved over the situation. Finally, to protect helpless women, he allowed men to divorce. They had to give their wives a certificate to prove her legal status as a divorced woman so she might marry a man who would love her. It was a concession. It should not be regarded as the main point of the law. Jesus goes back to Genesis to uphold God’s standard of marriage. Jesus said that divorce is not an option, except in the case of marital unfaithfulness.

Husbands and wives alike must think about the sin of hardening our hearts toward spouses. Marriage is not easy because it exposes our sins in a way that is undeniable. Sometimes we struggle painfully to forgive and love one another. The temptation can arise to dream about a happier life with someone who is more gracious, understanding, exciting, or whatever. Of course, we would never divorce. But living with hard hearts is almost the same. There was a rich doctor in a Chicago suburb. He was considered a great success in the community. But he hardened his heart toward his wife and lived that way for many years. He did not divorce for social and economic reasons. But there was no love in his marriage. When he came home he put on headphones to listen to music so that he would not have to listen to his wife. He barely knew his children. When he died, no one

grieved for him. They only cared about how much money they were allotted in his will. When was the last time you honestly shared your heart with your spouse? Let's all do so tonight. Let's share our hearts and forgive one another and confess our love for one another in Christ. Jesus died and shed his blood for us to change our hearts into hearts of flesh, not hearts of stone.

Third, marriage requires a personal decision of faith (10-12).

The disciples were shocked. They said, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." They thought marriage was like a lifelong sentence to hard labor and misery. How did Jesus answer? Look at verses 11-12. "Jesus replied, 'Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.'" Jesus teaches us that decisions about marriage are personal. Each of us should make this decision before God based on his word to us.

Fourth, Jesus blesses the little children (13-15).

One purpose of marriage is to produce godly offspring (Mal 2:15). It is fitting that Matthew inserts here the event of little children coming to Jesus. Look at verse 13a. "Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them." Parents who fear God seek God's blessing on their children more than anything else. They want Jesus' blessing more than any kind of earthly success. They are good parents. The disciples, however, wanted to protect Jesus and rebuked them. What did Jesus do?

Look at verses 14-15. “Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’ When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.” Jesus placed his hands on their heads and prayed for them one by one, “Father, bless John to study well and get straight A’s. Raise him as a great scholar and a spiritual leader for his time. Father, bless Jennifer to grow in humility and prayer spirit, to be an exemplary woman of God, and to marry the best man of God for your glory.” Jesus welcomes and blesses little children. In the same way, Jesus welcomes and blesses all who come to him with simple faith.

Today Jesus brought us back to Genesis and taught us God’s truth about godly marriages and families. Most of all, we learned that God must be the center of the family. Through godly families America can be changed. Let’s pray that 10,000 house churches may be raised for America and world mission. Let’s pray for each of our house churches to live up to God’s purpose for us and to be a blessing.