

TO WHOM DOES MATTHEW 19:3-12 APPLY?

Dave Miller, Apologetics Press

In order to sort out the proper application of the discussion on divorce in Matthew 19, one must take into account several contextual indicators. First, observe that in the context of the passage, Jesus addressed Himself to **Jews** —“*Pharisees*” (3)—not Christians. He answered **their** question: “*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?*” (3).

Second, if Jesus’ answer applies only to Christians (as some claim), then He did not help His Jewish inquirers and, in fact, He completely dodged their question. But He made clear that His answer **did** apply to them **and** to everybody else, for three reasons:

1. He said, “*Have **you** not read*” (4) and “*But I say unto **you***” (9). He was speaking to **them**!
2. He used the term “*whosoever*” (9)—an all-inclusive term that means anyone and everyone.
3. In verses 4-5, He appealed to Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 for His answer to their question. The instruction from Genesis **predates the Mosaic period** in its original context. Consequently, the teaching of Genesis (i.e., that God has intended from the very beginning of time for one man to be married to one woman for life, with the **only** exception being fornication) is teaching that applies to mankind and humanity in general.

Though (a) during certain time periods (e.g., Mosaic), people grew lax in their sensitivity to this Divine guideline, and though (b) God “*winked at*” this lax behavior (Acts 17:30), such is no indication that people today are free to ignore the laws of God on divorce and remarriage (Hebrews 13:4).

Third, notice the disciples’ reaction to the stringent nature of Jesus’ declaration: “*If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry*” (Matthew 19:10). In other words, if a man is obligated to remain married to his first spouse (with the **only** possibility for divorce and remarriage being the sexual unfaithfulness of that mate), then the man ought to think twice, deliberating long and hard, before he decides to get married the first time. In marrying, he is committing himself to a lifetime with the same woman (in God’s sight). It may very well be preferable to live single than to risk permanent marriage to a mate who creates misery and is unpleasant to live with (but who

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remains sexually faithful). This is the gist of the disciples’ remark to Jesus. They understood Jesus’ instruction to be very restrictive. But they then drew an erroneous conclusion by proposing the propriety, even priority, of celibacy.

Fourth, in response to the disciples’ remark, Jesus noted in verse 11 that not everyone can live as they suggested (i.e., single and celibate). The implication is that some, more than others, possess a greater need for companionship and the sexual relationship that accompanies that marital companionship. (Notice that sex is perfectly permissible in God’s sight—after all, He designed it! But, if one desires to indulge, the participant is under obligation to conform to divine guidelines, limiting and confining sexual activity to a scriptural marriage relationship). Jesus then elaborated upon three classes of men (12) who would be able to pursue the celibate life which the disciples proposed: (1) those who are born physically defective and, consequently, are unable to function sexually; (2) those who are born physically normal, but who are then surgically rendered unable to perform sexually. Though odd to the modern mind, it was a common practice in ancient cultures to render impotent various individuals who sought to function in official capacities, e.g., wards in charge of royal bedchambers, servants who lived in the palaces of royalty, etc. (cf. Genesis 37:26; 40:2,7; Daniel 1:3; Esther 1:10; 2:21; 1st Kings 22:9; 2nd Kings 8:6; 9:32; Acts 8:27); (3) those who simply choose to forego sexual relations and marriage in order to devote themselves completely to religious matters (like Jesus and Paul).

Fifth, Jesus’ concluding statement, “*he that is able to receive it, let him receive it*” (Matthew 19:12), pertains to that which He had been discussing, i.e., the choice to live celibate. He could not have been referring back to the statement of verse 9. Such would be a contradiction. For, on the one hand, He would have been declaring emphatically that those who divorce/remarry unscripturally are guilty of **committing adultery**, and then, turning right around and minimizing this declaration by suggesting that a person does not have to abide by the stricture if he does not want to. If people are free to decide their own guidelines for marriage, there was no need for Jesus to have even mentioned the matter in the first place. But when has God **ever** laid down **any** regulation with the implication that men do not have to obey if they do not wish to? The “*saying*” (11) with which He took issue, maintaining that it should not be set in concrete or urged upon mankind indiscriminately and universally, was the saying of the disciples—that men ought to refrain from marriage and live celibate

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"WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?"

ACTS 16:30

LEARN THE GOSPEL

John 6:45; Romans 10:17

BELIEVE IN CHRIST

Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16

CONFESS CHRIST

Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 3:19; 17:30

BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-6

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

"THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER"

HEBREWS 10:24-25

SUNDAY

Worship @ 10:00 a.m.

Studies @ 11:45 a.m.

WEDNESDAY

Studies & Worship @ 7:00 p.m.

THURSDAY

Ladies' Studies @ 6:20 p.m.

75 Sherrod Boulevard
Belén, New Mexico

**Seekers Welcome.
Members Expected.**

"IF A MAN IS OVERTAKEN IN ANY TRESPASS... RESTORE SUCH A ONE"

GALATIANS 6:1

CONFESS TRESPASSES

James 5:16; 1st John 1:9

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 8:22

PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS

Acts 8:22

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

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lives. Jesus' statement in verse 9 is clearly universal in its application and import. The disciples' statement in verse 10 is clearly limited in its scope and application to the three classes of individuals that Jesus delineated. Only those three categories of persons are in a position (physically, and/or mentally) to "receive this saying" pertaining to abstinence from marriage.

"WHOLE COUNSEL"

ACTS 20:27

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"A VERY PRESENT HELP"

Bryan Matthew Dockens

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

Presence is a powerful force. A father who only transfers monthly payments of child support, though they are abundant amounts, is nothing compared to a father, though he is poor, who is present in the life of his child, setting an example and imparting skills. Fathers must "sit in the house" with their children, they need to "walk by the way" with their children, they ought to "lie down" and "rise up" near their children (Deuteronomy 6:7). Involvement is minimal without presence!

God is present. More than that, He is **very present**. His divine nature is proved by His omnipresence, beholding all (Proverbs 15:3; Hebrews 4:13), and unable to be contained by heaven or earth (1st Kings 8:27). This presence of His, while potentially intimidating, is deeply comforting. He is right where He is needed all the time. It is not merely that He is everywhere, but specifically, that He is **with** His people. "He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5). "Jehovah is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth" (Psalm 145:18).

Comfort is the theme of the psalm. His presence is "our refuge" (Psalm 46:1). It is why fear is removed (2). That "Jehovah of hosts is with us" (7, 11) is the reason for our calm. He invites us to "Be still and know that I am God" (10).

RIO GRANDE VALLEY CHURCH OF CHRIST

505-864-0282

rgvcoc@gmail.com

Box 989, Belén, NM 87002

www.RGVChurchOfChrist.org

75 Sherrod Boulevard

Facebook.com/RGVChurchOfChrist