JESUS’ TEACHING ON MARRIAGE

Matthew 19:1-15

Key Verse: 6

**“**So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

In the previous chapter, we learned how much our Lord Jesus canceled the debt of our sins with his ransom sacrifice. We should forgive others’ sins as forgiven sinners. Today, we will learn about marriage and divorce based on Jesus’ own words and how to deal with children. In the community of Jesus, maintaining godly marriage life and raising godly children are essential. May we gain spiritual wisdom through Jesus’ teachings and strive to build up healthy church of God.

Look at verses 1-2. **“When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.”** One of Jesus’ 5 major discourses in Matthew’s gospel was over. Jesus left Galilee behind and traveled to Judea and the other side of the Jordan called Perea because he was on his last journey to Jerusalem for his suffering and death. Although it was a hard time for him personally, Jesus welcomed these crowds and healed them.

Verse 3 says, **“Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, ‘Is it lawful for a man divorce his wife for any and every reason?’”** These Pharisees did not come to find answers, rather to test Jesus. How foolish it was for men to test Jesus, God Himself! The topic of their question was divorce. They tried to make use of a controversy about divorce to trap Jesus. When John the Baptist challenged Herod Antipas to repent of his adultery and divorce, it cost him his life. John the Baptist was arrested, bound, put in prison and martyred because he rebuked the king Herod saying, **“It is not lawful for you to have her.”** Normally a man should strive to keep the marriage and family for any and every reason, not to divorce for any and every reason. But their question showed that they went far away from the norm.

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 flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.’”**

Jesus’ first response was a counter question, **“Haven’t you read.”** Jesus’ answer, **“haven’t you read”** means that every answer is in the bible. There is a story of missionary Young Lee in Chicago. When he was a hungry bachelor, he was cooking a soup. But the taste of the soup that he made was terrible. Dr.Samuel Lee came to his basement and saw what he did. Then he folded up his sleeve and began to cook, boiling vegetable first, mixing vegetables with seasoning and finally putting meat. The taste of kim chee chigea was so good. Then the young missionary asked him, “Where did you learn cooking? He replied, “If you study the Bible deeply, you can be a good cook. Everything is in the Bible.” It sounded funny. However, his point was that all answers are in the Bible.

Likewise, the answer to questions and criticisms can always be found in Scripture. Jesus redirected their question by asking, **“Haven’t you read?”** In Matthew 12, when the Pharisees accused Jesus for his disciple’s eating grain in the field on Sabbath, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.” Jesus also answered saying, **“Haven’t you read what David did**…” Jesus rebuked them for their neglecting the basic thing: reading the Scripture. Jesus’ rebuking question was like this, “Haven’t you read even Genesis chapter 1 and 2?” When questioned about the issue of divorce, Jesus appealed to the original meaning of marriage in creation. Jesus took them back to Genesis to help them to understand God’s purpose in marriage.

First, the Creator made people male and female. The meaning of Genesis is the book of origins expounding all the origins of universe, human race, sin, death, culture and so on. Without knowing the origin of human life, people are directionless. Genesis chapters 1 and 2 tell us about the origin of marriage. Genesis 1:27 says, **“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”** Human life came from the Creator. The Creator in his wisdom made male and female. They were both created in the image of God. There are differences between male and female, physically, emotionally and intellectually. According to the Creator, marriage is one man and one woman. God himself is able to work out the differences.

Second, marriage is a new beginning. **“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh.”** There are three vital events in life: birth, marriage and death. Birth and death belong to God. But marriage involves our decision of faith. After having grown up, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife. They establish a new family. The phrase, “**be united to**” is translated in other versions as “be joined”(NKJV), hold fast to his wife(ESV), and firmly bonded to his wife(MSG). In Greek, the word “united” in verse 5 literally means “glued.” A man and woman are glued together by a marriage covenant.

Third, the two will become one flesh. Usually, one plus one equals two in math. But in marriage, one plus one equals one. This is nonsense from a mathematical point of view. But in marriage, they are unified in a mysterious way. Marriage is spiritually binding before God. The husband gives himself to his wife and the wife gives herself to her husband.

How can the two become one? “Becoming one flesh” is a lifetime process until the two are one in spirit, heart and mind. It requires mutual effort to become one. It cannot be done naturally through human love only. It includes denying oneself and taking up each one’s own cross. Most of all, God is the common denominator. God’s love binds them. God’s wisdom guides them. God’s hope sustains them. God’s presence with them is their source of joy and strength. Then God solidifies their oneness. Life always holds challenges and difficulties for a man and his wife. But through it all, God binds them together tight all the more.

Look at verse 6. **“So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”** “**What God has joined together**” means that marriage is God’s institution, not man’s. Marriage is God’s work, not man’s work. How painful it would be if one tries to cut one flesh into two pieces! God has joined the two with his mighty power. What happens if we try to separate the two attached items that was put together by the crazy glue? It becomes torn apart from each other leaving damages. The point is that men should not break God glued work. It pays the cost of damaging each partner leaving scars and wounds not to mention children’s suffering. “**Joined together**” has the meaning of “yoked together” as oxen in the plough where each must pull equally. In ancient times, newly married people put a yoke upon their necks or chains upon their arms to show that they were to be one.

Yes! When God joins the two together, they become one flesh. Husband and wife becomes one team. They need a team spirit with same direction, vision and interest. The concepts, “I, me, mine” need to be changed to “we, us and ours.” When these teams worked together nicely, an amazing work of God takes place. According to Dr.Samuel Lee, 6,000 horse power is generated by a well bonded couple. How much horse power is your house church producing? We live in a culture where divorce is rampant. But God said through the prophet Malachi, “For I hate divorce”(Mal 2:16, NASB). **“Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.”(Mal 2:15)** When people keep their marriage alive and healthy and are faithful to each other from the heart, they can raise godly offspring.

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?’”** The Pharisees challenged Jesus again with a well prepared bible reference. Jesus answered in 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 sexual immorality and marries another woman commits adultery.”** Here, Jesus corrected the Pharisees’ misinterpretation. Moses permitted divorce, but not commanded it. Their real problem was their hardened heart. In Moses’ time, many men were hard hearted and abusive toward their wives. The intention of Old Testament laws was to protect abandoned women who were victims of divorce in men dominant society. But at the beginning of creation, divorce was not an option at all.

Verse 9 is echoing what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. Husbands and wives must think about the sin of hardening their hearts toward spouses. Marriage is not easy because it exposes our sins to spouses. Spouses cannot hide their sins and weaknesses from their spouses and vice versa. Sometimes we struggle painfully to forgive and love one another. We need to plow the hardened heart and make it generous and soft toward others. So we need to repent of our hardened heart daily. With Jesus’ help, let us constantly change our hearts of stone to hearts of flesh. We don’t live in the garden of Eden. We do not live with saint or angel like spouses at home. We live in a sin stained world. Yet God is still joining two in Jesus to be one flesh by his grace. When we come to know our Creator and his mind and heart, marriage can be fulfilling, holy and happy. Our marriage can produce good fruit pleasing to God. “Two becoming one” is a process that requires time and our endeavor like taking care of garden.

There is a Russian proverb regarding marriage. *“If you go to war pray once; if you go on a sea journey pray twice; but pray three times when you are going to be married.”* It tells how much important one’s marriage life is. It is one the most important life decisions. Marriage is sacred union. This passage gives us a good guideline how to maintain marriage life for married couples. At the same time, it gives singles a hope of godly marriage and value system. In our life journey to heaven, God provides us with a life companion who can converse endlessly and shares joy and pain together. We all must make every effort to build up healthy marriage for any and every reason.

The disciples said, **“If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”** It is astonishing to hear the disciples’ comment like this. The disciples were also influenced by the divorce common society of that time. They felt that marriage was like binding the two forcefully with some obligation. The question arises: What if I marry the wrong person? Should I suffer a lifelong unhappy marriage? They thought that it would be wise for them not to marry and avoid the pain of getting together and divorce.

But Jesus said, **“Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.”** It applies only to eunuchs. They are either born deformed or made by humans in ancient times to serve in a royal court. But Jesus mentioned another group in verse 12. **“There are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who accept this should accept it.”** These are people who choose to refrain from marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. They choose to live as singles to spread the kingdom message. Jesus teaches about the supreme value of the kingdom of God. Some receive a call to celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of God. The apostle Paul is a good example of this.

Look at verses 13-14. **“Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these”** Children were ignored in ancient society. The disciples did not want their teacher interrupted by such low status people like children. But Jesus welcomed the little children and blessed them. It is parent’s responsibility to bring their children to Jesus and not hinder them. The kingdom of God belongs to those who come to Jesus with humility and trust.

Children are a fruit of godly marriage. Parents who fear God seek God’s blessing on their children more than anything else. Jesus said, **“do not hinder them.”** When parents divorce or have a poor marriage relationship, in many cases it hinders their little children from coming to Jesus. Parents who truly love each other and are faithful to each other are a blessing to their children. The little children represent those who are seeking God. We should do our best not to hinder but help people come to Jesus. The way of receiving blessing is to humbly come to Jesus like little children. People in a church where there are healthy marriage and families can effectively advance the kingdom of God. May God make our church a community that welcomes people who are like little children. May God raise godly families and children among us as they hold on to Jesus’ teachings on marriage.