

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship
June 7, 2020
“Divorce & Remarriage”

Sunday school at 8:30, in-person Services at 9:15 & 10:45 with King’s Kids (Video live-taped sermon online by Monday afternoon).

Communion is for those who are Members of the Body of Christ.

NEWS

Brayden Nathan Bellamy Dedication
 Church camp at Little Bitterroot Lake, August 14-16.

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Matthew 19:3-6 ~

In their conspiring the Pharisees had come up with a good trap. Their question came from legalistic machinations related to Deuteronomy 24:1. The passage wasn’t about grounds for divorce, but they used it that way.

How different do you think we are from them?

Why is it impossible to determine the grounds from Scripture?

We answer our own questions by speaking for God.

You say smoking is a sin...

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

If God wanted to be explicit on a topic, He could have very easily done that. Why didn't He? Principles cover every eventuality, rules never can, and because of that, they are often nonsensical and even harmful in some situations. (Romans 14&15; Acts 17).

The Pharisees assumed that God was okay with divorce... The entire basis of their argument was false.

The starting point for any Christian discussion about gender, marriage, divorce, remarriage, and sex, is found in Genesis.

Matthew 19:7-9 ~

Jesus was not teaching that was an exception to His no separation conclusion.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

("Indecency," is Hebrew עָרְוָה (ěř-vä), meaning nakedness. "Immorality" is Greek πορνεία (pöř-nā-ä), meaning all sexual intercourse that is outside of a proper marriage and in this context, it is adultery).

Captain Jack Sparrow. "The only rules that really matter are these: what a man can do and what a man can't do."

If we lived up to the ideal, we'd be perfect... Repent of your sin. Accept the Blood of Jesus that wipes that sin away. Stand up on your feet and try again. All the while being humbly grateful for another chance and extending the grace to others that God has extended to you.

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon/Elder

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Alêtheia ~ Matthew 19b ~ 060620
 “Divorce & Remarriage”



Last week we saw Jesus’ amazing response to the Pharisee’s trap. Not only did we witness His genius, we saw how He did Bible interpretation... This is huge. We now have a template for how to do Bible interpretation for ourselves, the way the God does it - the way the Author thinks His Word should be used - the way the Word of God interprets the Word of God.

In going through that a little more carefully today, we will see even more clearly what God thinks about marriage, divorce, remarriage, and adultery. Fun times!

So, we start with an overview of what has transpired in Matthew 19 so far...

Jesus has now moved into the province of Judea near the Jordan River outside of the city of Jericho. There is a very large crowd of people that He is actively ministering to... Healing them, but no doubt also teaching them.

Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."



Matthew 19:3-6, 3Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" 4And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning **MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE,**

5and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? 6“So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

So, some Pharisees showed up to destroy what Jesus has going on. Not only are they jealous of Him, they genuinely think that He's not qualified to minister to the people and that He's some kind of charlatan who is taking advantage of them and poses a danger to their eternity. Besides that, every time they confront Him, He embarrasses them by making them look stupid in front of the people.

They are so opposed to Him, that they have already, as we saw in Matthew 12:14, gone “Out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.”

The Pharisees were as completely against Jesus, as Antifa is against Trump today, and likewise, the Pharisees had already plotted Jesus' permanent removal, one way or another, whatever it would take. Now, of course, Jesus was well aware of their intentions.

In their conspiring. They came up with a good trap. Corner Jesus with a highly controversial and emotionally charged question. We see the same tactic used in America today, by both sides, if we're honest.

The question came from legalistic machinations loosely related to Deuteronomy 24:1. There, God through Moses, provided some protections for wives in at least two ways. First, a husband couldn't abuse his wife by frivolously sending her away – he had to make it official and so final. Which leads to the second protection. As an official act, she was free from the control of her now ex-husband and therefore free to marry another.

The passage wasn't about divorce, remarriage, or grounds for either – it was about giving wives some rights.

From that the hard-hearted legalistic Pharisees had concluded that God was okay with a man divorcing his wife... Otherwise, it wouldn't be in the Scripture at all.

The controversy for the Jews at that time, and really even today, is what circumstances provided acceptable grounds to divorce her. Some thought it had to be fairly

serious, while others thought any reason, at all, would suffice.

If we look at the issue as the Pharisees did, we have the same problem. The Deuteronomy passage does allow for the possibility of divorce even if that's not what the passage is about. The fact is a woman cannot remarry her husband after an intervening marriage unless their first marriage together was ended in divorce. So, divorce is possible. What then are the grounds that God accepts? It's impossible to determine from Scripture. Why is it impossible to determine the grounds from Scripture? Because the Bible never addresses that concern.

Please, my dear friends, please understand and recognize this incredibly important point. The Bible was given to us by God Himself through 40 different divinely inspired men, over a roughly 15 century period of time, ending 20 centuries ago. God could have literally put anything He wanted in His Book, anything. He had the time, he had the ink and paper, He had the authors, He had the words and the ability to arrange the words to say anything He wanted to say to us... Anything.

There could be a whole lengthy treatment on the subject of proper grounds for divorce. Well, there isn't. So what happens instead? And it's the same for the Jews of Jesus' day as it is for Christians today. We take passages, verses, and oftentimes just a small phrase from the Bible that seems to be somewhat loosely related to the question, we devise... The thing we are interested in knowing. We lift those words out of their original context, and we make an interpretation that seems best to us. We answer our own question by misusing God's Word.

How can I say such a thing? Most of our humanly devised questions are not answered directly by God's Word and yet we are undeterred and make it fit anyway.

Will your beloved pet be in heaven? I don't know. Why? Because that was not a question that God chose to answer in His Book.

Nearly every Christian rule you can think of was derived in this way. I would give you examples, but someone would say, well that one really is what God wants. It's a monumentally difficult task to change someone's thinking on an issue when they are

entrenched in their error. Don't try to take the bone away from a hungry dog.

It's the same as a dialogue between a radical liberal and a radical conservative... Neither is even listening to the other... Once day some Mormons came to the house and I invited them in, and we talked. My son Scotty was listening in from another room. After they left, Scotty said, that sure seems like a waste of time. It was obvious that they weren't going to be persuaded by you, and you weren't going to be persuaded by them. When both sides think they already know the answer, no one is learning a thing.

So, I won't give examples and upset people who want to hold their view... But I would ask you to carefully examine the basis of your belief.

It's okay to have guidelines that are not explicitly Biblical, but please learn to be honest about it, because if you're not, you're misrepresenting the Bible and therefore misrepresenting the Author.

Okay, one silly example. You think smoking cigarettes is a really bad plan. You say it is a sin. You just played

the Trump Card... You've just ended any opposition to your opinion.

But, is it true, is smoking a sin? No, not as a clearly articulated Biblical proscription. The Bible is silent on smoking. It is not a clearly defined sin at all. Is it dumb? Yeah. There are all kinds of medical and ethical reasons not to smoke and there is a general Biblical principle that we are to take good care of our body because it is a gift from God. Further, as Christians, our body is no longer ours, it belongs to Christ. Beyond all of that, it does also have a negative effect on others. We have plenty of ammunition without resorting to misapplying the Bible.

It's important because we want to honor God by not putting our words in His mouth, but also because when we say smoking is a sin, we imply that smokers are engaged in continuing, perpetual, ongoing, sin, and therefore they must be, unsaved non-Christian heathens... Do we apply the same standard to people who are overweight, or to people who don't get enough exercise, or to people who neglect to floss, or who work too hard?

We have many prohibitions in Christianity that may, or may not, be reasonable, but we should stop pretending that they are Biblical. Beyond that, there are truly damaging interpretations that have caused needless turmoil in the church and in some cases, fighting, hatred and open warfare in the Body of Christ.

We talk about Christians burned at the stake by the Roman Emperor Nero, but far more have been burned at the stake by fellow Christians, both literally and figuratively... And all because they had a slightly different Bible interpretation.

If God wanted to be explicit, He could have very easily done that. In fact, He was ultra-specific on many things, especially in the Old Testament. Well, why wasn't He on other things? It sure would have made things easier – sure would help church unity if the Bible was a clear set of dos and don'ts.

Which is precisely why He didn't make His written Word a rule book. Principles cover every eventuality and can be adapted to fit the circumstances. Rules are too inflexible to ever fit, and because of that, they are often nonsensical and even harmful in some situations. (COVID 19 and the wearing of masks. Singing in

church versus rioting in the streets). The only way it works is for people to study the Bible with an open and willing heart, to respectfully discuss it and work through the differing ideas, all of course, bathed in prayer. Then we become convinced in our own mind what God desires from us and we grant grace to all those who see it differently for themselves.

That sounds pretty reasonable. I may have heard that somewhere before... Oh, yeah, that's what the Bible actually tells us to do. Romans chapters 14&15, make that clear. In Acts we see the Bereans praised for their careful listening and then their careful Scriptural research and then their wise assessment, and application of what they learned.

The Pharisees assumption from Deuteronomy was that God was okay with divorce... It does not say that, because He never was okay with it...

The entire basis of their argument was false. Jesus pointed out that it was never God's desire for a man to divorce his wife. From the very "Beginning," Genesis chapter 1, God had established marriage as a lifelong relationship between one man and one woman as made clear by His pronouncement that the two

opposite gender people were now one. Jesus then took it to the next logical level, and said that what God had made one, let no man make two again.

There are different facets, nuances or levels to Jesus' interpretation. Mankind should not dishonor the marriage God established. Hebrews 13:4 says, "Marriage is to be held in honor among you."

Additionally, it is a prohibition against any person interfering in another's marriage. Probably most specifically in this particular place, it means that a man must not separate his own marriage.

Now, beyond the explicit command that marriage was between one man and one woman, that it was to be instituted under God, and that it was a lifelong relationship that should not be otherwise separated, was the reality that it was the penultimate relationship for humankind, second only to mankind's relationship to God Himself.

The starting point for any Christian discussion about gender, marriage, divorce, remarriage and sex, is found in Genesis.

Jesus not only showed us that proper Bible interpretation starts with sweeping principles established by God, it concluded with sweeping principles of application, rather than legalistic rules. To take a principle and turn it into multiple, specific regulations, is to miss the entire point of the principle.

It is difficult for anyone reading this account in Matthew to stay with the principle of Jesus' interpretation and not leap to the rules and regulations of their own interpretation. What do I mean?

They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."



Matthew 19:7–9, 7They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?" 8He said to them,

“Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. 9“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

How many times have you heard that adultery is a free pass to divorce your spouse, husband or wife? How many times have you heard that divorce is forgivable, but remarriage is an unforgiveable sin because, like smoking, it constitutes a state of perpetual or ongoing adultery?

That’s two quick examples of the church jettisoning Jesus’ entire point and making legalistic black and white rules in place of God’s sweeping principles... Just like the Pharisees before us. Can you see that?

Jesus was not teaching that there is one, and only one, exception to His no separation conclusion. First, if that were the case, this entire exercise is a waste. If Jesus was giving the exception that made divorce okay, He could have dispensed with the rest of His argument, because He would have simply been joining the Pharisees, in rendering an opinion on what were acceptable grounds to eject one’s wife.

He would have played directly into their hands. He would have angered at least half the crowd and been a hero for siding with the rest in this ridiculous debate.

Secondly, not only that, but Jesus would have been wrong. The Torah basis for limited grounds is “Indecency,” the word עֶרְוָה (er-vah), meaning nakedness. Nakedness in much the way we use it... literally, but mostly figuratively. It meant improper, immodest, or even caught at a disadvantage. In certain contexts, it could mean adultery, but not here. It was indecency short of actual adultery. Jesus used the word πορνεία (por-na-a), translated in the NASB wrongly as “Immorality.” I say wrongly, because while it can cover adultery, we would normally think of things less than that.

Many bad doctrines come from misunderstanding this word. It means all sexual intercourse that is outside of a proper marriage and in this context means adultery.

Thirdly, if you notice, Jesus’ point wasn’t about grounds for divorce it was about the heart of the man who ditches his wife for another... In Jesus’ scenario, a man who divorces and remarries is doing so as a legal

means of committing adultery, unless, of course, it was because his wife was no longer faithful to him – God knows the Truth of the matter. That was Jesus' point and therefore, Jesus wasn't saying the remarried man was now in a perpetual state of unforgiveable adultery! He was saying God knows the heart and He sees through our self-serving duplicitous ways. It doesn't mean such a sinful mistake destroys our entire future. I so hope you can see that.

Fourthly, while Jesus can take the principle set forth in Genesis and say no divorce, is what's desirable, He cannot negate another clear teaching in the Bible. The Bible cannot contradict itself and while the Deuteronomy passage wasn't really about grounds for divorce, in creating the protection for women, it did indicate that divorce was an unfortunate reality in this world.

If Jesus had not mentioned an exception to His interpretation, His interpretation would not have been consistent with the whole counsel of Himself – the whole counsel of God's Word.

He mentioned the exception to allude to another Biblical principle... One that was the basis of the

Deuteronomy passage and was succinctly articulated by the character, Captain Jack Sparrow. “The only rules that really matter are these: what a man can do and what a man can’t do.”

Last week I mentioned Francis Chan and said that he was an idealist. I have a pastor friend who is a pragmatist. Those two guys are on opposite ends of the spectrum. The first is interested in how things should be and the second is interested in how things can be.

God is an idealist in the sense that He knows how things should be, but He’s also a pragmatist in the sense that He knows that, when it comes to fallen mankind, it will never be how it ought to be...

What we can do and what we can’t do... There are ministries I would love to see at Alêtheia, we don’t have the volunteers. There are expansions I’d like to see at Alêtheia, we don’t have the money... What we’d like to do, what would be better, what would benefit more people and advance God’s Kingdom as opposed to what we can actually pull off.

The ideal regarding the topic we're on about today? A well-adjusted manly man marries a well-adjusted womanly woman and the two live in complete harmony happily ever after raising a whole passel of well-adjusted boys and girls. Everyone has a distinct role in the family, and everyone plays their role with enthusiasm, grace and mutual respect... With love.

That's not at all possible, even under the best of circumstances. It's good to know the ideal and it's good to strive for it, but we must also be realistic. Jesus was promoting the ideal, while acknowledging reality.

He wasn't giving a loophole; He was confirming that people rarely live up to the ideal and it is because of sin... Sin of others and our sin that must be repented of, and must be cast away, as we receive forgiveness.

Think about it, if we all lived up to the ideal, we'd be perfect. Well, unfortunately, that will never happen this side of heaven. But, again, that does not mean we shouldn't know the ideal and do everything possible to get as close as to it as our Holy Spirit enabled selves are able.

So, there are issues in life that simply are not ideal. It's difficult enough when we're only talking about our individual ability to obey God perfectly – when we add another person to the mix, in the most intimate relationship possible, things get much more complicated. Life is not easy.

That's the crucible we're in. So, what's the answer? Recognize that this life is not really life at all. This is a temporary visitation to a semblance of life. Whether you believe the purpose of this present existence is to learn, or experience, or choose, or just to play a part in a grand scheme, what is certain, is that it lasts for a mere breath and then it's over.

Put your eggs in the eternity basket. I'll use an analogy. I was recently sent some information from Social Security. It showed my monthly income, if I retired at 62, 65, or waited until 67. As many of you know, the amount is bigger the longer you wait. That's a no brainer if I would collect for the same length of time, but that's not possible. No matter how long I last, I'll collect less years, the longer I wait. While that adds a wrinkle, it's easy to calculate the breakeven point. What makes the whole thing impossible is I don't know when that end will come. I knew a guy who wanted to wait in

order to collect the maximum. He died just months before he would have started collecting the maximum, just before he collected a single penny.

Knowing when to retire is a gamble because we don't know the future of our existence here... But we know without question that we will live forever. So, to retire early so to speak would be insane. What I mean is anyone who would take chances with their ultimate future to enjoy more now is an imbecile!

The Bible confirms that assessment – look at the Parable of the Rich Fool in Luke chapter 12. Focus on the real life you will live for eternity and don't let anything here in this temporary imitation of life distract you. “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

What does that mean? It means do not be a stumbling block to anyone and do not take yourself in this present existence so seriously that you allow others to be a stumbling block to you. In other words – get along well with others, especially with your spouse.

Bottom line... We are all imperfect and we have all made mistakes, are probably making some right now and will undoubtedly make more in the future.

Repent of your sin. Accept the Blood of Jesus as the "Cleansing Flood" that wipes that sin away. Stand up on your feet and try again. All the while being humbly grateful for the chance and extending the same grace to others that God has extended to you.