

Matthew 19 Commentary

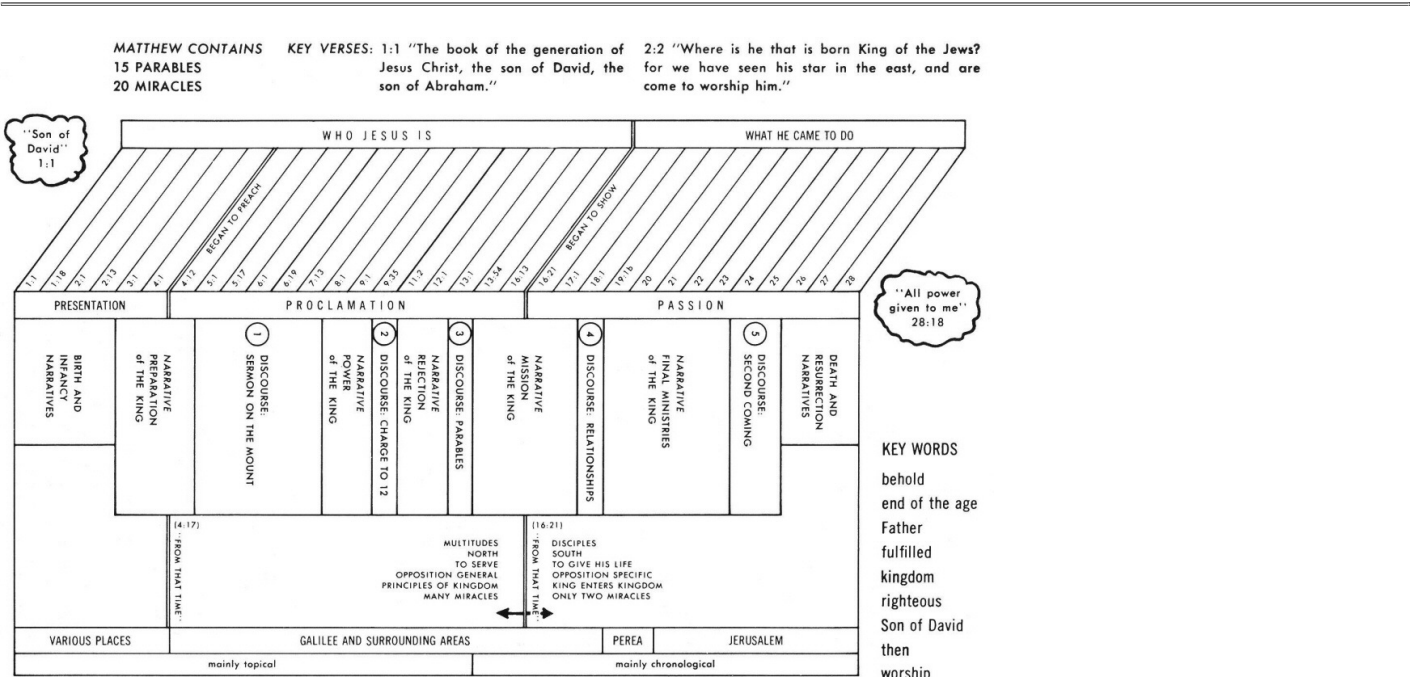
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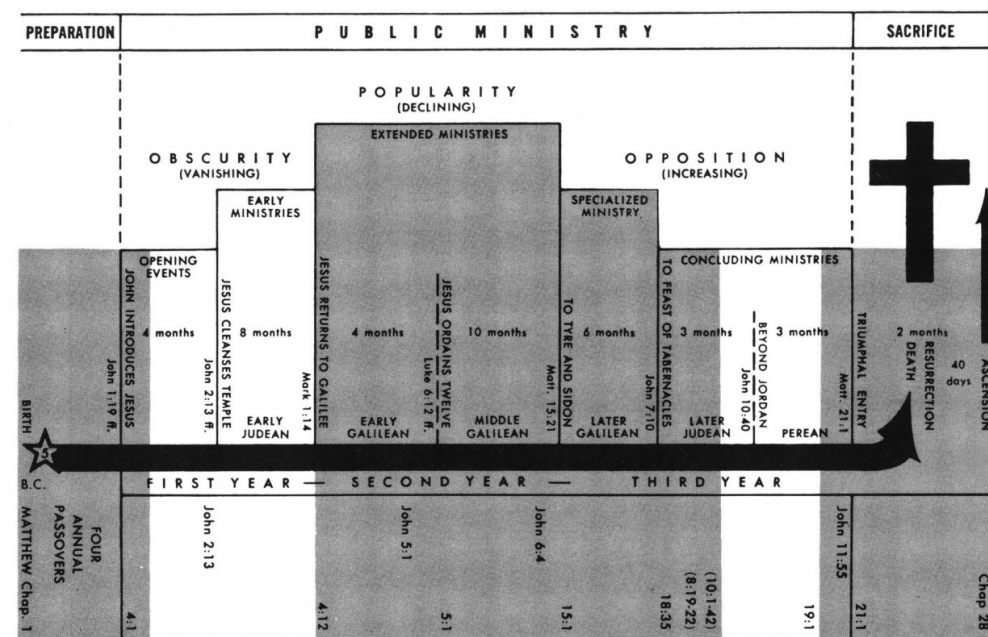
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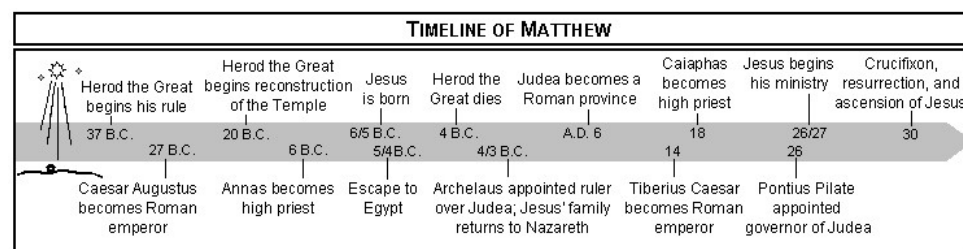
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THE LIFE OF JESUS AS COVERED BY MATTHEW (shaded area)



Click chart to enlarge



Source: Borrow [Ryrie Study Bible](#)

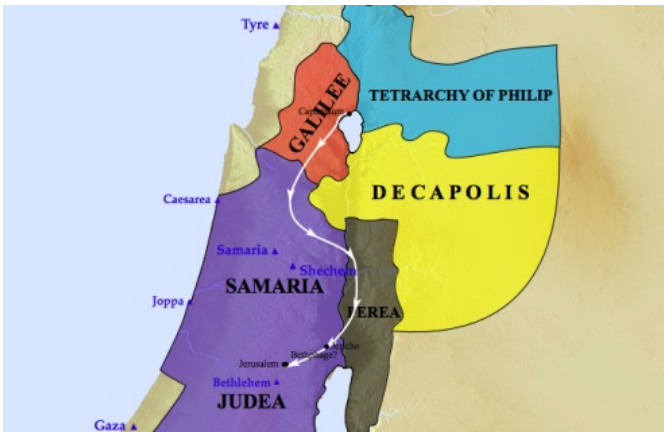
Matthew 19:1 When Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan;

- **that when:** Mk 10:1 Jn 10:40
- **he departed:** This was our Lord's final departure from Galilee, previous to his crucifixion; but he appears to have taken in a large compass in his journey, and passed through the districts east of Jordan. Some learned men, however, are of opinion, that instead of "beyond Jordan," we should render, "by the side of Jordan," as [peran <Strong's G4008>] especially with a genitive, sometimes signifies.

Related Passages:

Mark 10:1+ (**DESCRIBING THE SAME JOURNEY AS MATTHEW 19**) Getting up, He *went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan (EAST OF JORDAN); crowds *gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them (**MATTHEW'S PARALLEL VERSION DOES NOT MENTION THIS**).

Luke 9:51+ (**DESCRIBING THE SAME JOURNEY AS MATTHEW 19**) When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem;



Galilee To Judea

When **Jesus** ([lesous](#)) had finished ([teleo](#)) these words ([logos](#)) - (Note similar statements in Mt 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 26:1). What **words**? In context this would refer to His teaching on childlikeness and forgiveness in Mt 18:21-35+ that were spoken in Capernaum.

He departed ([metairo](#)) from [Galilee](#) and came into ([erchomai](#)) the region of [Judea](#) beyond the [Jordan](#) - Note on the map that Jesus is moving southward, toward His final destination, Jerusalem and the Cross (cf Mt 16:21+). The phrase **beyond the Jordan** generally refers to the region east of the Jordan River (notice the arrow in the map dipping into Perea, from root word *peran* = beyond).

Notice **Galilee** and **Perea** on the map above as these were ruled by a wicked [Herod Antipas](#) who had divorced his wife and married his brother's wife [Herodias](#) who had divorced her husband. John the Baptist was put to death because he questioned these divorces! You say "So what?" Here's what -- the serpentine Pharisees were about to pose a test question about divorce in an attempt to entrap Jesus. They surely surmised that Jesus was in very dangerous territory to have questions put to Him about divorce!

Beyond the Jordan - 36v - Gen. 50:10; Gen. 50:11; Num. 22:1; Deut. 3:8; Deut. 3:20; Deut. 3:25; Jos. 1:14; Jos. 1:15; Jos. 2:10; Jos. 5:1; Jos. 7:7; Jos. 9:1; Jos. 9:10; Jos. 12:1; Jos. 12:7; Jos. 13:8; Jos. 13:27; Jos. 13:32; Jos. 14:3; Jos. 17:5; Jos. 18:7; Jos. 20:8; Jos. 22:4; Jos. 22:7; Jos. 24:8; Jdg. 10:8; 1 Sam. 31:7; 1 Chr. 6:78; Matt. 4:15; Matt. 4:25; Matt. 19:1; Mk. 3:8; Mk. 10:1; Jn. 1:28; Jn. 3:26; Jn. 10:40

Grant Osborne notes that "The first clause (ED: *WHEN JESUS HAD FINISHED THESE WORDS*) is Matthew's formula for ending a discourse (cf. Mt 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1 26:1) and introduces the first of the comments on the travel narrative in Matthew. Jesus has spent His entire ministry thus far in Galilee (in Matthew at least; cf. John 2:1–13; 4:1–5:47; 7:1–52; 10:22–42 with several trips to Judea for the feasts) and now begins His final journey. (See [Matthew - Page 702](#))

R. T. France adds that "This is now the fourth use (ED: Mt 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1 26:1) of the concluding formula (ED: *WHEN JESUS HAD FINISHED THESE WORDS*) which marks each of the five main discourses. The formula serves again both to conclude the discourse and to move the narrative on into its next phase. Within the narrative structure of this part of the gospel the next phase must be the approach to Jerusalem, which was announced as the ultimate goal of their journey in Mt 16:21+ and toward which they have been travelling since leaving the area of Caesarea Philippi. They have passed through Galilee again on their way southward (Mt 17:22, 24), but now the group finally leave their home province and head for the unfamiliar territory of Judea and its threatening capital Jerusalem. They will not return to Galilee until Mt 28:16+, after all Jesus' predictions have been fulfilled. (See [The Gospel of Matthew - Page 190](#))

Matthew Henry Concise - Mt 19:1-2. Great multitudes followed Christ. When Christ departs, it is best for us to follow him. They found him as able and ready to help elsewhere, as he had been in Galilee; wherever the Sun of Righteousness arose, it was with healing in his wings.

Matthew 19:2 and large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there.

- Mt 4:23-25 Mt 9:35,36 Mt 12:15 Mt 14:35,36 Mt 15:30,31 Mk 6:55,56

Related Passages:

Matthew 4:23-25+ Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. 24 The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. 25 Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

SUPERFICIAL FOLLOWERS

And large crowds ([ochlos](#)) **followed** ([akoloutheo](#)) **Him** - Some of the large crowds may have been because of pilgrims going to the Passover, which is a bit ironic as they were following the true Passover Lamb! While these crowds were "followers" of Christ, most were not followers in the sense of true disciples (like the 12 disciples, cf Mt 4:20+). **Followed** ([akoloutheo](#)) is an important verb in the Gospels but requires close observation of the context to yield an accurate interpretation. In the present context there is no suggestion that the crowd was composed of genuine (born again) disciples. These **large crowds** were like those in John 6:2+ where "A large crowd followed Him, (WHY FOLLOW HIM?) because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick." However note the response to His "hard sayings" in John 6 where "many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." (Jn 6:66+) Now in Mt 19:2 we again see large crowds responding to His signs of healing. The contrast is clearly seen in Mt 19:21, 27, 28+, where Jesus issues the call regarding the cost of discipleship and then issues the command to follow Him. The **large crowds** followed Him to get something, while true disciples counted the cost to follow Him (cf Mk 8:34-37+). Mark's parallel passages add "He began to teach them." (Mk 10:1+).

Adam Clarke on **followed Him** - "Some to be instructed-some to be healed-some through curiosity-and some to ensnare him."

And He healed ([therapeuo](#)) **them there** - Sadly the text says He healed them there, but not that they believed in Him there! Matthew makes no statement that faith was required for these healings to take place. Jesus simply, miraculously healed, each healing being like a blinking neon sign saying "Believe in Me as the One sent by the Father to take away the sins of the world." The specific physical healings would fit the classification John alluded to in John 20:30+ stating "many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book." Sadly most of the crowd missed the purpose of the signs which was to encourage them to seek spiritual healing and might "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." (Jn 20:31+ = purpose for John's Gospel) To say it another way, while many Israelites followed Jesus for His miracles, sadly few followed Him for Who He is, the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

THOUGHT - Why do I follow Jesus? Am I following Jesus for what He can do for me or because of who He is to me? Answer carefully, because your answer could well determine your eternal destiny.

Crowds (3793)(ochlos) 1) throng of people milling around or closely pressed together, crowd, multitude (Mt 5.1); (2) (common) people, in contrast to the authorities populace, masses (Acts 24.12); used contemptuously of the lower classes rabble (Jn 7.49); (3) (specific) company containing many people, large number (Lk 6.17; Acts 1.15); (4) plural (hosts of) peoples, along with other designations of the divisions of mankind, as laoi, (peoples), ethne (nations), glossai (languages) (Rev 17.15) (Borrow [Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament](#))

OCHLOS - 167V - Matt. 4:25; Matt. 5:1; Matt. 7:28; Matt. 8:1; Matt. 8:18; Matt. 9:8; Matt. 9:23; Matt. 9:25; Matt. 9:33; Matt. 9:36; Matt. 11:7; Matt. 12:23; Matt. 12:46; Matt. 13:2; Matt. 13:34; Matt. 13:36; Matt. 14:5; Matt. 14:13; Matt. 14:14; Matt. 14:15; Matt. 14:19; Matt. 14:22; Matt. 14:23; Matt. 15:10; Matt. 15:30; Matt. 15:31; Matt. 15:32; Matt. 15:33; Matt. 15:35; Matt. 15:36; Matt. 15:39; Matt. 17:14; Matt. 19:2; Matt. 20:29; Matt. 20:31; Matt. 21:8; Matt. 21:9; Matt. 21:11; Matt. 21:26; Matt. 21:46; Matt. 22:33; Matt. 23:1; Matt. 26:47; Matt. 26:55; Matt. 27:15; Matt. 27:20; Matt. 27:24; Mk. 2:4; Mk. 2:13; Mk. 3:20; Mk. 3:32; Mk. 4:1; Mk. 4:36; Mk. 5:21; Mk. 5:24; Mk. 5:27; Mk. 5:30; Mk. 5:31; Mk. 6:34; Mk. 6:45; Mk. 7:14; Mk. 7:17; Mk. 7:33; Mk. 8:1; Mk. 8:2; Mk. 8:6; Mk. 8:34; Mk. 9:14; Mk. 9:15; Mk. 9:17; Mk. 9:25; Mk. 10:1; Mk. 10:46; Mk. 11:18; Mk. 11:32; Mk. 12:12; Mk. 12:37; Mk. 14:43; Mk. 15:8; Mk. 15:11; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 3:7; Lk. 3:10; Lk. 4:42; Lk. 5:1; Lk. 5:3; Lk. 5:15; Lk. 5:19; Lk. 5:29; Lk. 6:17; Lk. 6:19; Lk. 7:9; Lk. 7:11; Lk. 7:12; Lk. 7:24; Lk. 8:4; Lk. 8:19; Lk. 8:40; Lk. 8:42; Lk. 8:45; Lk. 9:11; Lk. 9:12; Lk. 9:16; Lk. 9:18; Lk. 9:37; Lk. 9:38; Lk. 11:14; Lk. 11:27; Lk. 11:29; Lk. 12:1; Lk. 12:13; Lk. 12:54; Lk. 13:14; Lk. 13:17; Lk. 14:25; Lk. 18:36; Lk. 19:3; Lk. 19:39; Lk. 22:6; Lk. 22:47; Lk. 23:4; Lk. 23:48; Jn. 5:13; Jn. 6:2; Jn. 6:5; Jn. 6:22; Jn. 6:24; Jn. 7:12; Jn. 7:20; Jn. 7:31; Jn. 7:32; Jn. 7:40; Jn. 7:43; Jn. 7:49; Jn. 11:42; Jn. 12:9; Jn. 12:12; Jn. 12:17; Jn. 12:18; Jn. 12:29; Jn. 12:34; Acts 1:15; Acts 6:7; Acts 8:6; Acts 11:24; Acts 11:26; Acts 13:45; Acts 14:11; Acts 14:13; Acts 14:14; Acts 14:18; Acts 14:19; Acts 16:22; Acts 17:8; Acts 17:13; Acts 19:26; Acts 19:33; Acts 19:35; Acts 21:27; Acts 21:34; Acts 21:35; Acts 24:12; Acts 24:18; Rev. 7:9; Rev. 17:15; Rev. 19:1; Rev. 19:6

Followed (190) [akoloutheo](#) from **a** = expresses union with, likeness + **keleuthos** = a road, way) means to walk the same road (Ponder that simple definition dear believer - Am I willing to walk the same road as Jesus?) Literally to follow (like the crowds followed Jesus) and in a figurative sense to follow Jesus as a disciple. To follow (closely) and was used of soldiers, servants and pupils. To go after someone or something (not as a true disciple however as we see with the crowds who physically followed Jesus, following however without a willingness to commit wholly to Him! cf John 6:60-65, 66) Early in the history of the Greek language **akoloutheo** came to mean to imitate or follow someone's example. This dual meaning colored the New Testament use of our word **akoloutheo**. Note that most of the uses of **akoloutheo** are in the Gospels and thus this verb is firmly linked with the life of

Jesus, for He is the One to follow.

When Jesus issued a call to "Follow Me" (see the 12 highlighted verbs in list below, all present imperative) *akoloutheo* was always in the present imperative indicating that Jesus is calling for this to be one's lifelong path, ultimately one which can only be successfully trodden by yielding to His Spirit who enables us to obey that command as our lifestyle (not perfection, but general direction). There is a big difference between the disciples who followed Jesus in Mt 4:20, 22+ and the crowds following Him (Mt 4:25+, Mt 8:1+, etc) for the former left their possessions (nets, boat), while the latter left nothing. Some claimed they wanted to follow Him but were not willing to count the cost (Mt 8:19, 22). In the Gospels *akoloutheo* is always related to Jesus as the object of following in discipleship (exceptions: Mark 9:38; 14:13 par. Luke 22:10; Matt 9:19; John 11:31; 20:6) The phrase **Follow Me** 19x all [present imperative](#) (see [need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) - Matt. 4:19; Matt. 8:22; Matt. 9:9; Matt. 16:24; Matt. 19:21; Mk. 1:17; Mk. 2:14; Mk. 8:34; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 5:27; Lk. 9:23; Lk. 9:59; Lk. 18:22; Jn. 1:43; Jn. 10:27; Jn. 12:26; Jn. 13:36; Jn. 21:19; Jn. 21:22

[Click here for an in depth discussion of *akoloutheo* in the New International Dictionary of the New Testament](#) - Here is an excerpt - **Disciple, Follow, Imitate, After** - Men are dependent upon one another and their lives are shaped by each other in many ways. Sometimes it is through a casual relationship, an interested companion or hanger-on. But it may be the more lasting relationship of a pupil or disciple to his master or teacher. In the NT, the words connected with discipleship are applied chiefly to the followers of Jesus and describe the life of faith. *akolouthēō* (follow) denotes the action of a man answering the call of Jesus whose whole life is redirected in obedience. A *mathētēs* (disciple) is one who has heard the call of Jesus and joins him. *mimēomai* (imitate) can be distinguished, in so far as it mainly emphasizes the nature of a particular kind of behaviour, modelled on someone else. The prep. *opiso* (after) is characteristic of the call to follow Jesus.

TDNT - In Greek the ordinary sense of following led to that of intellectual, moral, and religious following. (IN NT) External following is still involved (cf. Matt. 8:19; Mark 10:28) but with a total commitment and in an exclusive relation to one who is recognized as not just a teacher but the Messiah. This discipleship brings participation in salvation (Mark 10:17; Luke 9:61-62; Jn. 8:12; Rev. 14:4), but also in suffering (Matt. 8:19-20; Mark 8:34; Jn. 12:25-26). The strength of the figurative use may have been in the presence of sayings like Matt. 10:38, the possibility of discipleship without literally going after Jesus, and the active stress which rules out the use of a noun to express the concept. Since it is the historical Jesus that is followed, it is natural that other terms should be found in the other NT writings to describe the relation to the exalted Lord and his Spirit. Rev. 14:4 simply applies Matt. 10:38 to a particular group. (BORROW [Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament : abridged in one volume](#))

Akoloutheo in Matthew - Matt. 4:20; Matt. 4:22; Matt. 4:25; Matt. 8:1; Matt. 8:10; Matt. 8:19; Matt. 8:22; Matt. 8:23; Matt. 9:9; Matt. 9:19; Matt. 9:27; Matt. 10:38; Matt. 12:15; Matt. 14:13; Matt. 16:24; Matt. 19:2; Matt. 19:21; Matt. 19:27; Matt. 19:28; Matt. 20:29; Matt. 20:34; Matt. 21:9; Matt. 26:58; Matt. 27:55

Healed (cure) (2323) [therapeuo](#) from **therapon** = an attendant, servant) means primarily to care for, to wait upon, minister to. It has two main senses in the NT, one speaking of rendering service (Acts 17:25) and the more common use describing medical aspects such as to take care of the sick, to heal, to cure (Matt. 4:24; 12:10; Mark 1:34; Luke 6:7; 10:9), to recover health, to restore. *Therapeuō* means to heal miraculously in Matt. 4:23, 24; 10:1, 8; Acts 4:14. Providing care to improve a situation.

THERAPEUO IS PRIMARILY FOUND IN THE GOSPELS - Matt. 4:23; Matt. 4:24; Matt. 8:7; Matt. 8:16; Matt. 9:35; Matt. 10:1; Matt. 10:8; Matt. 12:10; Matt. 12:15; Matt. 12:22; Matt. 14:14; Matt. 15:30; Matt. 17:16; Matt. 17:18; Matt. 19:2; Matt. 21:14; Mk. 1:34; Mk. 3:2; Mk. 3:10; Mk. 6:5; Mk. 6:13; Lk. 4:23; Lk. 4:40; Lk. 5:15; Lk. 6:7; Lk. 6:18; Lk. 7:21; Lk. 8:2; Lk. 8:43; Lk. 9:1; Lk. 9:6; Lk. 10:9; Lk. 13:14; Lk. 14:3; Jn. 5:10; Acts 4:14; Acts 5:16; Acts 8:7; Acts 17:25; Acts 28:9; Rev. 13:3; Rev. 13:12

Matthew 19:3 Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?"

- **testing Him and asking:** Mt 16:1 Mt 22:16-18,35 Mk 10:2 12:13,15 Lu 11:53,54 Jn 8:6 Heb 3:9
- **Is it lawful** Mt 5:31,32 Mal 2:14-16

Related Passages:

Deuteronomy 24:1-4+ (See [note below](#) on Mt 19:7) "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency (*'ervat davar*) in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, 2 and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who

took her to be his wife, 4 then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.

Matthew 16:1+ The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and **testing** ([peirazo](#) - present tense - continually) Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven.

Matthew 22:16-18+ And they *sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. 17 "Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" 18 But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you **testing** ([peirazo](#) - present tense - continually) Me, you hypocrites?

Matthew 22:35-36+ One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, **testing** ([peirazo](#) - present tense - continually) Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

TESTING THE TEACHER! ON THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA

[Horns of a dilemma](#) is a situation in which one has to choose between things that are unpleasant or undesirable.

Spurgeon - Here are these vipers again! What perseverance in malice! Little cared they for instruction, yet they assumed the air of inquirers. In truth, they were upon the catch, and were ready to dispute with him whatever he might say. The question is cunningly worded "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? " The looser the terms of a question, the more likely is it to entangle the person interrogated. Their own consciences might have told them that the marriage bond is not to be severed for any and every reason that a man likes to mention. Yet it was a question much disputed at the time, whether a man could send away his wife at pleasure, or whether there must be some serious reason alleged. Whatever Jesus might say, the Pharisees meant to use his verdict against him. (See Matthew 19 Commentary)

Some Pharisees ([pharisaiois](#)) **came to** ([proserchomai](#)) **Jesus** ([lesous](#)) - **Came to** pictures them as coming forward from among the large crowd to face Jesus. There is a bit of a play on words here (IMO), because the verb ([proserchomai](#)) is used repeatedly in Hebrews for drawing near to God (Heb 4:16, 7:25, 10:22, 11:6) which in fact the Pharisees were doing! Of course the intent of their heart's hidden agenda totally changes the meaning of the drawing near in the present context!

Stuart Weber makes an interesting point that "The Pharisees had been outwitted by the king at every turn, so they came at him again with another test. And it was a dangerous one. John the Baptist's dealing with the issue of divorce had cost him his head. (See [Holman New Testament Commentary - Matthew](#))

Testing ([peirazo](#) - present tense - continually attempting to ensnare) **Him and asking** (present tense) (here is the test question) - **Testing** ([peirazo](#)) is by itself a neutral testing, but this context clearly had a negative connotation for the Pharisees should to trip Jesus on a hot button topic. [Peirazo](#) was used by Satan in tempting Jesus in Mt 4:1,3+. Their evil intent was to ensnare Jesus into making a controversial or self-incriminating statement. Clearly they sought to expose Jesus as inconsistent with Mosaic Law and/or to alienate Him from His followers, particularly those Jews who supported more permissive views on divorce.

Van Parunak: The Pharisees know that divorce is a **sensitive subject in Perea**. They also know that the Lord's position on divorce, as presented in the Sermon on the Mount, is similar to John's. When they find Christ in this region, they try to lure him into saying something about divorce that will enrage Herod's wife, so that she will destroy him as she did John. Matthew and Mark record portions of the resulting conversation.

D. A. Carson suggests that "Their "test," here, was probably delivered in the hope that Jesus would say something to damage his reputation with the people or even seem to contradict Moses. Perhaps, too, they hoped that Jesus would say something that would entangle him in the Herod-**Herodias** affair so that he might meet the Baptist's fate. (See [The Expositor's Bible Commentary - Page 87](#))

David Guzik on the nature of their **testing** - So in their question, the Pharisees tried to get Jesus to side with one teaching or the other. If He agreed with the lax school of [Rabbi Hillel](#), it was clear that Jesus did not take the Law of Moses seriously. If He agreed with the strict school of [Rabbi Shammai](#), then Jesus might become unpopular with the multitude, who generally liked access to an easy divorce. The religious leaders had reason to believe they had caught Jesus on the horns of a dilemma.

The **Hillel school** ([see another note](#)) took a very loose view of the phrase "no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her," (Dt 24:1+) and felt it allowed divorce for virtually any reason, including trivial

reasons (e.g., burning food, speaking too loudly, putting too much salt on food) and this was the dominant view in much of the Jewish society in Jesus' day. The [Shammai school](#) permitted a man to divorce only if she was found guilty of sexual immorality or unfaithfulness, which was closer to what Jesus would affirm, but less popular. The result was that most Jewish men in Jesus' day could — and did — divorce their wives easily, often just by giving her a certificate of divorce. Women could not easily initiate divorce (except in rare cases), making them extremely vulnerable socially and economically. In short, in this section of Matthew Jesus rejected the easy-divorce culture and brought them back to God's original design.

Jesus was now in the jurisdiction of [Herod Antipas](#) (Judea and beyond the Jordan) and it is conceivable that the Pharisees were hoping Jesus might give an answer like John the Baptist resulting in his imprisonment and execution (Mt 14:1-12,10+) for criticizing [Herod Antipas'](#) unlawful marriage to [Herodias](#) (his brother's wife). In short motive of the Pharisees was to discredit, trap, stir up political trouble and or expose Jesus as contradicting the Law of Moses or Jewish traditions.

“Is it lawful (exesti) for a man to divorce (apoluo) his wife for any reason (aitia) at all?” - As discussed above [Hillel school](#) allowed divorce basically **for any reason at all!** Burn the toast and you're toast!

NET NOTE - The question of the Pharisees was anything but sincere; they were asking it to test him. Jesus answered the question not on the basis of rabbinic custom and the debate over Deut 24:1, but rather from the account of creation and God's original design.

NET NOTE - TECHNICAL NOTE - ‡ Most MSS have either $\nu\theta\rho\omega\pi$ (anthrōpō, “for a man” [so 2 κ C D W Θ 087 f1, 13 33 latt]) or $\nu\delta\pi$ i (andri, “for a husband” [1424c pc]) before the infinitive $\pi\omicron\lambda\sigma\alpha$ i (apolusai, “to divorce”). The latter reading is an assimilation to the parallel in Mark; the former reading may have been motivated by the clarification needed (especially to give the following $\alpha\tau\omicron$ [autou, “his”] an antecedent). But a few significant MSS (κ^* B L Γ 579 [700] 1424* pc) have neither noun. As the harder reading, it seems to best explain the rise of the others. NA27, however, reads $\nu\theta\rho\omega\pi$ here.

David Guzik - Barclay says that the Rabbis had many sayings about bad marriages and the bad wife. They said that the man with a bad wife would never face hell, because he has paid for his sins on earth. They said that the man who is ruled by his wife has a life that is not life. They said that a bad wife is like leprosy to her husband, and the only way he could be cured is by divorce. They even said, “If a man has a bad wife, it is a religious duty to divorce her.”

Life Application Study Bible note - The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus with their question. If he supported divorce, he would be upholding the Pharisees' procedures, and they doubted that he would do that. If Jesus spoke against divorce, however, some members of the crowd would dislike his position; some may have even used the law to their advantage to divorce their wives. More important, he might incur the wrath of Herod, who had already killed John the Baptist for speaking out against divorce and adultery (Mark 6:17-28). This is what the Pharisees wanted. The Pharisees saw divorce as a legal issue rather than a spiritual one. Jesus used this test as an opportunity to review God's intended purpose for marriage and to expose the Pharisees' selfish motives. They were not thinking about what God intended for marriage and were quoting Moses unfairly and out of context. **Jesus showed these legal experts how superficial their knowledge really was.** (See [NLT Life Application Study Bible - Page 1683](#))

Charles Swindoll: The debate among the Pharisees themselves centered on the meaning of the words “*he has found some indecency in her*” (Deut. 24:1). The interpretations of this expression tended to go in one of two directions in Jesus' day. The more conservative school of thought restricted this language to be referring to only sexual immorality, while the more liberal school of thought understood “*indecency*” to include anything that displeased a husband. . . I suppose this question was posed by the more conservative teachers. But they weren't trying to win Jesus' support so as to gain points against their liberal opponents. Rather, they were attempting to set up a tripwire that Jesus would spring, entangling Himself in a net of complex biblical, theological, practical, and political controversy from which He wouldn't be able to extricate Himself. Little did they know that they weren't dealing with some amateur interpreter of the Law of Moses . . . they were dealing with the Author Himself!

Bruce points out that in Jesus' day ““The Jews had very low views of women...A wife was bought, regarded as property, used as a household drudge, and dismissed at pleasure.” (See [The Expositor's Greek Testament - Volume 1 - Page 246](#))

Guzik adds that “Their low view of women meant that their high ideal of marriage was constantly compromised, and those compromises were made into law, as with the thinking of [Rabbi Hillel](#). Under the thinking of Hillel, “a man could divorce his wife if she spoiled his dinner, if she spun, or went with unbound hair, or spoke to men in the streets, if she spoke disrespectfully of his parents in his presence, or if she was a brawling woman whose voice could be heard in the next house. Rabbi Akiba even went the length of saying...that a man could divorce his wife if he found a woman whom he liked better and considered more beautiful.” (Barclay)

Matthew Henry Concise - Mt 19:3-12. The Pharisees were desirous of drawing something from Jesus which they might represent as contrary to the law of Moses. Cases about marriage have been numerous, and sometimes perplexed; made so, not by the law of

God, but by the lusts and follies of men; and often people fix what they will do, before they ask for advice. Jesus replied by asking whether they had not read the account of the creation, and the first example of marriage; thus pointing out that every departure therefrom was wrong. That condition is best for us, and to be chosen and kept to accordingly, which is best for our souls, and tends most to prepare us for, and preserve us to, the kingdom of heaven. When the gospel is really embraced, it makes men kind relatives and faithful friends; it teaches them to bear the burdens, and to bear with the infirmities of those with whom they are connected, to consider their peace and happiness more than their own. As to ungodly persons, it is proper that they should be restrained by laws, from breaking the peace of society. And we learn that the married state should be entered upon with great seriousness and earnest prayer.

[William Barclay](#) has some interesting background on **marriage among the Jews** writing that "No nation has ever had a higher view of marriage than the Jews. Marriage was a sacred duty. To remain unmarried after the age of twenty, except in order to concentrate upon the study of the law, was to break a positive commandment to 'be fruitful and multiply'. The man who had no children 'slew his own posterity' and 'lessened the image of God upon earth'. 'When husband and wife are worthy, the glory of God is with them.'"

Marriage was not to be entered into carelessly or lightly. Josephus outlines the Jewish approach to marriage, based on the Mosaic teaching (Antiquities of the Jews, 4:8:23). A man must marry a virgin of good parentage. He must never seduce another man's wife; and he must not marry a woman who had been a slave or a prostitute. If a man accused his wife of not being a virgin when he married her, he must bring proof of his accusation. Her father or brother must defend her. If the girl was vindicated, he must take her in marriage, and could never again put her away, except for the most flagrant sin. If the accusation was proved to have been reckless and malicious, the man who made it must be beaten with forty stripes save one, and must pay fifty shekels to the girl's father. But if the charge was proved and the girl found guilty, if she was one of the ordinary people, the law was that she must be stoned to death, and if she was the daughter of a priest, she must be burned alive.

If a man seduced a girl who was engaged to be married, and the seduction took place with her consent, both he and she must be put to death. If, in a lonely place or where there was no help present, the man forced the girl into sin, the man alone was put to death. If a man seduced an unattached girl, he must marry her, or, if her father was unwilling for him to marry her, he must pay the father fifty shekels.

The Jewish laws of marriage and of purity aimed very high. Ideally, divorce was hated. God had said: 'I hate divorce' (Malachi 2:16). It was said that the very altar wept tears when a man divorced the wife of his youth.

But ideal and actuality did not go hand in hand. In the situation, there were two dangerous and damaging elements.

First, in the eyes of Jewish law, a woman was a thing. She was the possession of her father, or of her husband as the case might be; and therefore she had, technically, no legal rights at all. Most Jewish marriages were arranged either by the parents or by professional matchmakers. A girl might be engaged to be married in childhood, and was often engaged to be married to a man whom she had never seen. There was this safeguard: when she came to the age of twelve, she could reject her father's choice of husband. But in matters of divorce, the general law was that the initiative must lie with the husband. The law ran: 'A woman may be divorced with or without her consent, but a man can be divorced only with his consent.' The woman could never initiate the process of divorce; she could not divorce, she had to be divorced.

There were certain safeguards. If a man divorced his wife on any other grounds than those of flagrant immorality, he must return her dowry; and this must have been a barrier to irresponsible divorce. The courts might put pressure on a man to divorce his wife, in the case, for instance, of refusal to consummate the marriage, of impotence, or of proved inability to support her properly. A wife could force her husband to divorce her, if he contracted a loathsome disease, such as leprosy, or if he was a tanner, which involved the gathering of dogs' excrement, or if he proposed to make her leave the Holy Land. But, by and large, the law was that the woman had no legal rights, and the right to divorce lay entirely with the husband.

Second, the process of divorce was fatally easy. That process was founded on the passage in the Mosaic law to which Jesus' questioners referred: 'Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house...' (Deuteronomy 24:1). The bill of divorcement was a simple, one-sentence statement that the husband dismissed his wife. Josephus writes: 'He that desires to be divorced from his wife for any cause whatsoever (and many such causes happen among men) let him, in writing, give assurance that he will never use her as his wife any more; for by this means she may be at liberty to marry another husband.' The one safeguard against the dangerous ease of the divorce process was the fact that unless the woman was a notorious sinner, her dowry must be returned.

Related Resource:

Pharisees (5330) **pharisaïos** is transliterated from the Hebrew **parash** (06567 - to separate) from Aramaic word **peras** (06537) ("Peres" in [Da 5:28-note](#)), signifying to separate, owing to a different manner of life from that of the general public. After the resettling of the Jewish people in Judea on their return from the Babylonian captivity, there were two religious groups among them. One party contented themselves with following only what was written in the Law of Moses. These were called **Zadikim**, the righteous. The other group added the constitutions and traditions of the elders, as well as other rigorous observances, to the Law and voluntarily complied with them. They were called **Chasidim** or the pious. From the Zadikim the sects of the Sadducees and Karaites were derived. From the Chasidim were derived the Pharisees and the Essenes. In I Mac2:42, among the persons who joined Mattathias against Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), about 167 b.c., are named the Asideans (Asidaíoi), who are described as voluntarily devoted to the law. The Asideans are mentioned also in I Mac 7:13; II Mac14:6. In the time of our Lord, the Pharisees were the separatists of their day, as well as the principal sect among the Jews. The Pharisees considered themselves much holier than the common people (Lu 18:11, 12). They wore special garments to distinguish themselves from others. **PRINCIPLE TENETS OF PHARISEES:** In opposition to those of the Sadducees, and the former group maintained the existence of angels and spirits and the doctrine of the resurrection (Acts 23:8), which the latter party denied (Mt 22:23; Mk 12:18; Lu 20:27). The Pharisees made everything dependent upon God and fate (Josephus, *The Jewish Wars*, ii.8.14). However, they did not deny the role of the human will in affecting events (Josephus, *Antiquities*, xviii.1.3). **ZEAL FOR TRADITION:** The Pharisees distinguished themselves with their zeal for the traditions of the elders, which they taught was derived from the same fountain as the written Word itself, claiming both to have been delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai (Mt 15:1-6; Mk 7:3-5). See also *parádosis* (3862), tradition, and *éntalma* (1778), a religious precept versus *entole* (1785), commandment. ([See more detailed notes from William Barclay](#))

Testing (3985) (**peirazo** from the noun **peira** = test from **peíro** = perforate, pierce through to test durability of things; cf **dokimazo** & **peirasmos**) is a morally neutral word simply meaning "to test". Whether the **test** is for a good (as it proved to be in Heb 11:17) or evil (Mt 4:1 "*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be **tempted** by the devil*") depends on the intent of the one giving the test and also on the response of the one tested. To endeavor to discover the nature or character of something by testing. (2Co 13:5, 1Co 10:13+) This use can refer to a trial of God by humans, the intent being **to put God to the test**, to discover whether God really can do a certain thing.

Test is *peirazo*, meaning "*to test, tempt*" It is the same verb Matthew used of Satan tempting Jesus in Mt 4:1, 3; the Pharisees and Sadducees demanding the second sign in Mt 16:1; the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians together trying to trap Jesus concerning taxation (Mt 22:18) and the greatest commandment (Mt 22:35). Their "test" was an action of malicious intent.

Lawful (1832) (**exesti** from **ek** = out + **eimí** = to be) is an impersonal verb, signifying "it is permitted, it is lawful" (or interrogatively, "is it lawful?"). *Exesti* occurs most frequently in the synoptic Gospels and the Acts, especially in Jesus' conflicts with the Pharisees over His actions (and those of His disciples) on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:2; 12:4; 12:10; 12:12, etc). **BDAG** - 1. to be authorized for the doing of something - it is right, is authorized, is permitted, is proper. 2. to be within the range of possibility, it is possible (Acts 2:29)

Divorce (send away, release) (630) (**apoluo** from **apó** = marker of dissociation, implying a rupture from a former association, separation + **luo** = loose) is used often of sending a person or a group away from someone (Mt 14:15, 22, 23, 32, etc). **Apoluo** frequently has the sense of to let loose from or to release (as from under arrest or from another's custody), as it is used here in Acts 17:9. To let go free or set at liberty. **Apoluo** is used in all four Gospels describing the **release** of Barabbas instead of Jesus (Jn 18:39, Mt 27:15, 17, 21, etc, cf Acts 16:35) **Apoluo** frequently is means to **divorce** (let go free or release a wife Mt 5:31, 32; 19:3; and a husband in Mk 10:12). **Apoluo** is never used in the marriage context with the meaning of just to separate (as the term is commonly used today) or to break an engagement, but always means full fledged **divorce**.

Paul Apple has some helpful remarks on the controversial topic of divorce...

Orthodox Evangelical commentators have long been divided on their positions on this passage as it relates to the teaching of Jesus regarding the permanency of marriage and potential for divorce and remarriage. You have John MacArthur and D. A. Carson and the vast majority of Christendom today on the side of allowable exception clauses that would validate divorce and remarriage for believers in specific cases. While John Piper, James Boice, Voddie Baucham and others would hold to no allowance for divorce and remarriage under any circumstances as long as the departing spouse has not yet died. So I enter humbly into this discussion without claiming that I have the last word or the simple truth.

It is interesting that both sides have criticized the other side for taking a position based on utilitarian grounds, when in fact all the players named above certainly have accurate biblical exegesis and the pursuit of truth as

their sincere goal. It has been claimed that those holding the permanency view are simply trying to stem the tide of rampant increases in the rates of divorce and remarriage in society. While the reverse charge is that pastoral pressure from the prevalence of complicated life situations has rendered the permissive interpretation less than inductively-based and objective in approach. I choose to stay clear of all such charges and admit the complexity of the issues since so many different passages are involved. I have to add that no expositor can claim complete objectivity, but at least I don't have some of the more common pressures of denominational positions or immediate pastoral pressures of a large church to impact my thinking.

There is no question that a pastoral heart is required for sensitivity towards those who have either experienced or been impacted by such situations. We must always embrace the compassion of God in extending love and forgiveness and grace as we seek to maintain the unity of the body and to encourage all believers to grow in Christ in their present situation. But still truth is truth and we must endeavor to discern the mind of Christ on this important issue and apply truth without compromising.

My personal view aligns with the **Permanency of Marriage** without any provision for divorce or remarriage. Obviously, the "exception clauses" such as we find in **Matt. 19** will be the major sticking point for me. The following observations have informed my conclusions:

- The starting point should be **God's design for marriage** and His stated **hatred of divorce** rather than investigating how far one can push the envelope before crossing the line into obvious transgression. How can anything but death of one of the partners break the **one-flesh union** that God creates in marriage?
- The simple statements of Jesus show that He is comfortable with unambiguous support of the permanency of marriage. It is only in the **Jewish context** in Matthew, when pressed by the entrapment-minded Pharisees that He addresses any type of possible exception. There are a variety of approaches to interpreting His response.
- The Pharisees expected Jesus to support the more conservative of the two schools of thought of the day – that which would only allow divorce in the case of adultery or sexual sin. Yet Jesus so shocked His disciples by taking a **more extreme position** that they almost despaired of the option of marriage. Jesus encouraged them with additional teaching about God's grace and provision for **celibacy** where appropriate. Thus Jesus remained consistent to His requirement that kingdom ethics required righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees.
- Some of the topics in the surrounding context in the Gospel of Matthew include the **unlimited nature of forgiveness** and the importance of **faithfulness to vows** – both of which would be compromised by the Permissive View.
- The Permanency view better maintains the essential symbolic picture of the **relationship between Christ and His bride the church**.
- The Permanency view better fits the hermeneutical principle of **interpreting unclear passages in light of clear passages** rather than vice versa.

I also find that the Permissive View allows for fallen humans to attempt to "game" the system and create a situation where they can take advantage of the "**exception**" **loophole** to escape an undesirable marriage.

- For example, take a mixed marriage situation where the believing spouse could antagonize the unbeliever to the point where the unbeliever would seek a divorce and supposedly release the believer from bondage to remarry.
- Or even in a marriage between believers, a spouse could manipulate the situation to make it more like that the partner commit adultery and make divorce and remarriage a viable option.

That seems like a dangerous can of worms to me.

Of course the relevant passages still need to be exegeted in a manner that would allow for this Permanency View.

Stu Weber: Lifelong marital faithfulness is God's intention, requiring our dependence on his supernatural strength.

William Barclay: Beyond all doubt, the ideal is that marriage should be an indissoluble union between two people, and that marriage should be entered into as a total union of two personalities, not designed to make one act possible, but designed to make all life a satisfying and mutually completing fellowship. That is the essential basis on which we

must proceed.

R. T. France: The whole pericope therefore constitutes a double challenge to conventional attitudes to marriage:

- on the one hand God intends marriage to remain unbroken, and the current acceptance of divorce is a surrender to human failure;
- on the other hand, for some people obedience to God's will may properly mean that they do not marry at all.

The resultant argument develops as follows:

- statement of basic scriptural principle (**vv. 4–6**);
- counter-scripture (**v. 7**);
- resolution of how scripture B relates to scripture A (**v. 8**);
- resultant pronouncement (**v. 9**).

Donald Hagner: Again in this pericope we encounter the absoluteness of the kingdom of God and its ethics. In his answer to the question about divorce, Jesus appeals to the creation narrative of Genesis. The kingdom of God brought by Jesus is ultimately to involve the restoration of the perfection of the pre-fall creation, and the ethics of the kingdom as taught by Jesus reflect this fact. As God intended no divorce for the Garden of Eden, so divorce is not to be allowed in the new era of the kingdom of God. The call of some to celibacy also reflects the priority of the kingdom in the present time frame.

Van Parunak: Each component of the Lord's teaching emphasizes that marriages are made in heaven, but divorce is a purely human product. Every party involved in divorce and remarriage is guilty of adultery. The Lord condemns the mate who initiates the divorce, and (if remarriage follows the separation) the one who is put away and the second partner. The fornication clause seems to make an exception. But it was **only recorded for Jewish audiences**, and they should know from their own Scriptures that fornication leads, not to divorce, but to **death**.

Question - What were the Shammaite and Hillelite interpretations of Jewish Law?

Answer: Shammai and Hillel were two influential Jewish rabbis whose commentaries on the Torah shaped Jewish theology and philosophy for hundreds of years. The Shammaite and Hillelite schools were the two dominant approaches to Jewish Law during the years of Jesus' earthly ministry. Unfortunately, the destruction of the temple in AD 70 resulted in the loss of most records relating to the debates between these two groups. The Hillelite school quickly gained dominance after the temple was razed, so much of what we know about first-century Hillelite and Shammaite law comes exclusively from later Hillelite writers. These writers portray the Shammaite-Hillelite divide in a manner similar to modern two-party politics, with each side seemingly bound and determined to contradict the other on everything.

According to tradition, Shammai was a Pharisee who taught in the years just prior to Jesus' birth. In his commentary on the Law, he emphasized the need for temple rituals, and his interpretation is characterized as strict, literalist, and Israel-centric. The school that followed those interpretations is referred to as the Shammaite interpretation of Jewish Law.

Rabbi Hillel, a contemporary of Shammai, was less concerned with temple worship. His commentary is seen as being more liberal, tolerant, and accepting of Gentiles. Hillel was also known for codifying traditional patterns for exegesis into seven individual rules. His Hillelite school was a rival to the Shammaite approach. After the destruction of the temple, the influence of the Shammaite school faded, and Hillel's philosophy became the dominant approach to Jewish Law for more than 400 years.

Scholars are unsure how many of the differences between the Shammaite and Hillelite schools are factual and how many are the products of revisionist history. While Jewish scholars prior to AD 70 make frequent reference to the disagreements between these two groups, the vast majority of surviving records are from Hillelite writers. It's possible that the Hillelites exaggerated some of the differences between Shammai and Hillel in order to portray Hillel in a more heroic light.

Even with such open questions, it's clear that the interplay between Shammai and Hillel influenced Judaism during the early Christian era. The rivalry between the two schools greatly contributed to Judaism's growing belief that the oral law—such as promoted in the Shammaite or Hillelite schools—was as authoritative as the written Torah.

Some scholars debate which school, Shammaite or Hillelite, had a greater influence on the theology of the New Testament. Jesus' restrictive rules on [divorce](#) echo those of Shammai, while Hillel allowed for a wider range of acceptable reasons to end a marriage. Jesus also phrased the "[Golden Rule](#)" using a more challenging, positive expression, in contrast to Hillel's lighter, negative expression of the same basic idea. At the same time, Jesus was welcoming of non-Jewish people and often castigated the Pharisees for their excessive legalism. The fact is that Jesus presented the truth, and His agreement with either Shammai or Hillel was secondary and coincidental. Jesus spoke the Father's Word, and His teaching cannot be seen as a defense of any rabbi (John 12:49).

There is also an academic debate over the influence of Shammai and Hillel on the theology of the apostle Paul. On one hand, Paul was a student of Gamaliel, who came from the Hillelite school and might have even been Hillel's grandson. But, prior to his conversion, Paul (Saul) was hardly a tolerant, Gentile-friendly Pharisee. Rather, in opposition to Gamaliel's teaching, Paul took a severe stance. And in his letters Paul expresses an Israel-centric, all-or-nothing obedience to the Law (Romans 3:19–28; cp. James 2:10), which many scholars would identify more with Shammai. Of course, as he was writing inspired Scripture, Paul was not concerned with what rabbi might have had a past influence upon him; he was "carried along by the Holy Spirit" and wrote what the Spirit wanted (2 Peter 1:21).

Ultimately, the differences between Shammaite and Hillelite interpretations of Jewish Law are more a matter of historical trivia than a major concern for Christianity. While their influence on Jewish theology might have been significant, the teachings of Shammai and Hillel are ultimately irrelevant against the contents of Scripture and the actual teachings of Jesus Christ. (Source: [GotQuestions.org](#))

Related Resource:

- [What does the Bible say about divorce and remarriage? gotquestions](#)

Matthew 19:4 And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE,

- **Have:** Mt 12:3 21:6,42 22:31 Mk 2:25 12:10,26 Lu 6:3 10:26
- **that:** Ge 1:27 5:2 Mal 2:15

Related Passages:

Genesis 1:27+ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 2:23+ The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

ARGUMENT FROM GOD'S DESIGN IN CREATION

And He answered ([apokrinomai](#)) - Jesus knew this brood of vipers had an evil intent and a desire to trap Him and so replies with a Biblical answer that must have puzzled them.

And said, "Have you not read ([anaginosko](#)) that He who created ([ktizo](#)) them from the beginning ([arche](#)) MADE ([poieo](#)) THEM MALE AND FEMALE - The Pharisees had focused on divorce, but Jesus wants to talk about what the Bible says about marriage, so He goes back to the first marriage between Adam and Eve (No gender confusion back at creation). The Pharisees were basing their Biblical perspectives on divorce on the Law of Moses in Deuteronomy, not Genesis. So Jesus takes them back to the beginning to answer their test question. As an aside, do not miss the fact that Jesus regarded the creation record as historical and thus divinely inspired. With these words "made them..." Jesus refuted the lie of evolution and endorsed the literal truth of Adam and Eve. He did not say they evolved but were **made** ([poieo](#)), i.e., created!

*The Pharisees wanted to talk about divorce,
but Jesus wanted to talk about marriage and God's divine blueprint.*
- Danny Akin

Stu Weber: **Have you not read** implies that the answer should have been **obvious**. Jesus was unveiling the Pharisees' true

motives, which was to trap him. In effect, he was saying, "You know better than to ask this question." Marriage should reflect God's image, not guarantee our personal "happiness." The permanent marriage bond is in keeping with God's original design for men and women. (See [Holman New Testament Commentary - Matthew](#))

Grant Osborne: Jesus' point is that God created men and women to be together, not to be divorced. . . The purpose of creation is the God-given union of "*male and female*."

Spurgeon on Jesus' tact of going back to Genesis - Our Lord honors Holy Scripture by drawing his argument therefrom. He chose specially to set his seal upon a part of the story of creation – that story which modern critics speak of as if it were fable or myth." (See [Matthew 19 Commentary-C H Spurgeon](#))

Adam Clarke adds that "By answering the question, not from Shammai or Hillel, but from Moses, our blessed Lord defeated their malice, and confounded their devices."

William Barclay nails it by noting that "In the case of Adam and Eve divorce was not only inadvisable; it was not only wrong; it was completely impossible, for the very simple reason that **there was no one else whom either of them could possibly marry!**" (Bolding added)

*Marriage is like a mirror;
it reflects what we put into it.*

David Guzik rightly says that "Divorce cannot be seen as a ready option when things are difficult in married life. Marriage is like a mirror; it reflects what we put into it (**ED: I WOULD ADD IT IS MORE ABOUT GIVING THAN TAKING!**) If one or both partners has divorce readily in their mind as a convenient option, divorce will be much more likely....In quoting Genesis 1:27, Jesus indicated first that God made men and women different (**ED: TRY TO CONVINCE MANY IN AMERICA OF THAT TRUTH IN 2025!!!**), and that God joins men and women together in marriage. In this, Jesus asserts God's authority over marriage; it is God's institution, not man's – so it is fair to say that His rules apply.

John MacArthur - By quoting from Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24, Jesus was saying, "Your argument is not with Me, but with God." His words must have stung the proud, self-righteous Pharisees, who considered themselves to be the supreme authorities on Scripture. (See [Matthew Commentary - Page 165](#))

R C H Lenski points out that "In Matthew the question about Moses (Mt 19:7) is placed after the exposition regarding the creation of man as male and female (Mt 19:4-6); Mark seems to have the true order. **In Matthew the Pharisees raise the question about Moses, in Mark it is Jesus who does so.** Mark follows the formal fact, Matthew intends to bring out the detail that this was a question that was always raised by the Pharisees. So in Mark's account Jesus wants them to speak out on what they have to say about Moses. It was that one passage from Moses (Deut. 24:1) which they imagined decided the entire question. (Borrow [The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel page 414](#))

Robert Gundry: Traditionally, marriage vows were "consummated" by sexual union. The Bible says husband and wife "*become one flesh*." God planned for a man and a woman first to give their hearts, then their wills to each other, through wedding vows. Then they can give their bodies. Then, as the Bible says, they can be naked and feel no shame. We can reveal ourselves, show our warts, both literal and metaphorical. When two people pledge to love one another for life, it becomes safe to give the body. It is safe to become pregnant. When two people promise to love as long as they live, it is no longer a half-insane risk to have a child. But God wants more than "safety" for us. The pledge of lifelong loyalty makes physical intimacy safe. But when the pledge begins to feel formal or dry, physical intimacy both expresses and rekindles love. As the Song of Solomon celebrates love in marriage, the woman says, "*I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me*" (**Song 7:10**). We are used to hearing that we should control our desires, but the Bible encourages desire in marriage and for good reason. In marriage, we take the body of the beloved after we have first given mind and will to the beloved. Then we can take another without abusing the other, and we can give ourselves without fear of rejection or domination. That provides the foundation for intimate love. But when we give the body without marriage, the relationship often becomes unsettled, insecure. People fret, "Is he committed to this relationship? As much as I am?" When premarital sex is common, it also leaves people less motivated to marry.

Answered (611)(apokrinomai from **apó** = from + **kríno** = separate, discern, judge) to respond to a question asking for information = answer, reply , conclude for oneself, respond; introduce or continue a somewhat formal discourse Mt11:25 Hebr. [cp H6030] begin to speak where an address is expected; answer or return answer which ought to be done with discretion Mt 3:15; 4:4; 26:23; 27:12); take occasion to speak or say, where something has preceded (either said or done) to which the remarks refer Mt 11:4; 12:38; 17:4; 22:1; 26:25, 63; Mk 9:5, 17; Lu 7:40

Friberg - (1) answer, reply, as a somewhat formal response or reaction to a speech, exhortation, question, or

request, generally followed by a direct quoted answer (Jn 1.21); (2) Hebraistically, as a formula to control the flow of discourse; (a) continue (Mt 11.25); (b) begin, speak up (Mt 14.28); (c) answer or often left untranslated or translated as a single verb when combined with a form of speech verb, such as eipen (Lk 1.19), legei (Lk 11.45), ephe (Lk 23.3), le,gontej (Mt 25.37)

APOKRINOMAI - 207V - answer(20), answered(169), answered answered(1), answering(8), answers(1), made...answer(1), replied(2), reply(1), respond(1), responded(2), response(1), said(1). Matt. 3:15; Matt. 4:4; Matt. 11:4; Matt. 12:39; Matt. 12:48; Matt. 13:11; Matt. 15:3; Matt. 15:13; Matt. 15:23; Matt. 15:24; Matt. 15:26; Matt. 16:2; Matt. 16:16; Matt. 17:11; Matt. 17:17; Matt. 19:4; Matt. 20:13; Matt. 20:22; Matt. 21:21; Matt. 21:27; Matt. 21:29; Matt. 21:30; Matt. 22:29; Matt. 22:46; Matt. 24:4; Matt. 25:9; Matt. 25:12; Matt. 25:26; Matt. 25:37; Matt. 25:40; Matt. 25:44; Matt. 25:45; Matt. 26:23; Matt. 26:62; Matt. 26:66; Matt. 27:12; Matt. 27:14; Mk. 3:33; Mk. 6:37; Mk. 7:28; Mk. 8:4; Mk. 8:29; Mk. 9:6; Mk. 9:17; Mk. 9:19; Mk. 10:3; Mk. 10:24; Mk. 10:51; Mk. 11:22; Mk. 11:29; Mk. 11:30; Mk. 11:33; Mk. 12:28; Mk. 12:29; Mk. 12:34; Mk. 14:40; Mk. 14:60; Mk. 14:61; Mk. 15:2; Mk. 15:4; Mk. 15:5; Mk. 15:9; Mk. 15:12; Lk. 1:19; Lk. 1:35; Lk. 1:60; Lk. 3:11; Lk. 3:16; Lk. 4:4; Lk. 4:8; Lk. 4:12; Lk. 5:5; Lk. 5:22; Lk. 5:31; Lk. 6:3; Lk. 7:22; Lk. 7:40; Lk. 7:43; Lk. 8:21; Lk. 8:50; Lk. 9:19; Lk. 9:20; Lk. 9:41; Lk. 9:49; Lk. 10:27; Lk. 10:28; Lk. 10:41; Lk. 11:7; Lk. 11:45; Lk. 13:8; Lk. 13:14; Lk. 13:15; Lk. 13:25; Lk. 14:3; Lk. 15:29; Lk. 17:17; Lk. 17:20; Lk. 17:37; Lk. 19:40; Lk. 20:3; Lk. 20:7; Lk. 20:39; Lk. 22:51; Lk. 22:68; Lk. 23:3; Lk. 23:9; Lk. 23:40; Lk. 24:18; Jn. 1:21; Jn. 1:26; Jn. 1:48; Jn. 1:49; Jn. 1:50; Jn. 2:19; Jn. 3:3; Jn. 3:5; Jn. 3:10; Jn. 3:27; Jn. 4:10; Jn. 4:13; Jn. 4:17; Jn. 5:7; Jn. 5:11; Jn. 5:19; Jn. 6:7; Jn. 6:26; Jn. 6:29; Jn. 6:43; Jn. 6:68; Jn. 6:70; Jn. 7:16; Jn. 7:20; Jn. 7:21; Jn. 7:46; Jn. 7:47; Jn. 7:52; Jn. 8:14; Jn. 8:19; Jn. 8:33; Jn. 8:34; Jn. 8:39; Jn. 8:48; Jn. 8:49; Jn. 8:54; Jn. 9:3; Jn. 9:11; Jn. 9:20; Jn. 9:25; Jn. 9:27; Jn. 9:30; Jn. 9:34; Jn. 9:36; Jn. 10:25; Jn. 10:32; Jn. 10:33; Jn. 10:34; Jn. 11:9; Jn. 12:23; Jn. 12:30; Jn. 12:34; Jn. 13:7; Jn. 13:8; Jn. 13:26; Jn. 13:36; Jn. 13:38; Jn. 14:23; Jn. 16:31; Jn. 18:5; Jn. 18:8; Jn. 18:20; Jn. 18:22; Jn. 18:23; Jn. 18:30; Jn. 18:34; Jn. 18:35; Jn. 18:36; Jn. 18:37; Jn. 19:7; Jn. 19:11; Jn. 19:15; Jn. 19:22; Jn. 20:28; Jn. 21:5; Acts 3:12; Acts 4:19; Acts 5:8; Acts 5:29; Acts 8:24; Acts 8:34; Acts 8:37; Acts 9:13; Acts 10:46; Acts 10:46; Acts 11:9; Acts 15:13; Acts 19:15; Acts 21:13; Acts 22:8; Acts 22:28; Acts 24:10; Acts 24:25; Acts 25:4; Acts 25:9; Acts 25:12; Acts 25:16; Col. 4:6; Rev. 7:13

Matthew 19:5 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'?

- **said:** Ge 2:21-24 Ps 45:10 Mk 10:5-9 Eph 5:31
- **be joined:** Ge 34:3 De 4:4 10:20 11:22 1Sa 18:1 2Sa 1:26 1Ki 11:2 Ps 63:8 Ro 12:9
- **and they:** 1Co 6:16 1Co 7:2,4

Related Passages:

Genesis 2:21-24+ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 **For this reason** a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

LEAVE AND CLEAVE THE PLAN FROM THE BEGINNING

and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE ([kataleipo](#)) HIS FATHER ([pater](#)) AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED ([kollao](#)) TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE ([heis](#)) FLESH ([sarx](#))' - Ask for what **reason**? The historical event of Ge 2:23 is the basis for the contemporary practice of Ge 2:24. This passage is still part of His question "Have you not read..." These were the men in Israel who were supposed to know the Law of Moses. The idea of **leave** ([kataleipo](#)) is to leave behind and separate from one's parents. The picture of **joined** ([kollao](#)) means joined closely, united, "glued together." The Hebrew verb [dabaq](#) conveys the same idea, literally describing two things physically sticking together and figuratively pictureing the clinging to one to another, bound by the glue of love and loyalty. (see [illustration](#))

As **Matthew Poole** said "The law of God was not, that a man should forsake his wife whenever he had a mind to it, but that he should rather forsake his father and mother than his wife; that he should cleave unto his wife, living and dwelling with her."

Treasury of Scripture Knowledge on **be joined** - "shall be cemented to his wife," as the Hebrew [dabaq](#) implies; a beautiful metaphor, forcibly intimating that nothing but death can separate them.

John MacArthur - The idea of close bonding and interrelationship is seen in the modern Hebrew word for marriage, kiddushin, a word closely related to the terms for holy and sanctified, which have the basic meaning of being set apart and consecrated. This meaningful word for marriage beautifully expresses the consecration of husband and wife to each other as well as to God. Marriage as God has always intended it to be involves the total commitment and consecration of husbands and wives to each other and to Him as the divine author of their union and witness to their covenant.....They are therefore indivisible and inseparable, except through death. In God's eyes they become the total possession of each other, one in mind and spirit, in goals and direction, in emotion and will. When they have a child it becomes the perfect emblem and demonstration of their oneness, because that child is a unique product of the fusion of two people into **one flesh** and carries the combined traits of both parents. (See [Matthew Commentary - Page 165](#))

Spurgeon - The woman was taken out of man, and Adam truly said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23). By marriage this unity is set forth and embodied under divine sanction. This oneness is of the most real and vital kind: "They

are no more twain, but one flesh .” All other ties are feeble compared with this: even father and mother must stand second to the wife: “For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and, shall cleave to his wife. ” Being divinely appointed, this union must not be broken by the caprice of men: “What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. ” Our Lord thus decides for the life-long perpetuity of the marriage bond, in opposition to those who allowed divorce for “every cause”, which very frequently meant for no cause whatever (See Matthew 19 Commentary)

S. Lewis Johnson: And finally, I think we can say the Lord Jesus regarded marriage as a permanent union. We read, here, for example—or rather, verse 5—“For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife.” That word is very interesting. That word in the Greek text is a word that meant, literally to glue or cement together ([illustration](#))—something I don’t think that we are to take literally—but you can see that it expresses a union that is regarded as permanent. Erasmus referred to this in the Latin text and translated this, aglutenabatur, which means the same thing, “shall be glued together.” You can recognize our English word from the Latin word, aglutenabatur, the future tense of that word. Glued together. So, the ideal is an indissoluble union. He says, “And shall cleave to his wife.

Henry Morris - Modern critics often allege that the first two chapters of Genesis are two different and contradictory accounts of creation. Jesus, however, quoted Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24+ as being perfectly complementary and of absolute authority. Furthermore, He was there at the beginning!

Leave ([2641](#))([kataleipo](#) from **kata** = intensifies or strengthens the meaning of **leipo** + **leipo** = to leave behind, forsake, to be wanting or deficient) literally means to leave behind or leave remaining (of a person or place - Mt 4:13, 16:4, 21:17, Heb 11:27). **Kataleipo** is often used to indicate abandoning a heritage, giving up riches, and leaving one's native land. Figuratively **kataleipo** was used to mean "neglect" (Acts 6:2+). **Kataleipo** conveys a strong sense of to abandon or forsake (as forsaking true Christianity 2Pe 2:15). To cause something to be left over and so to remain in existence (Ro 11:4+, Heb 4:1+ = a promise remains). To leave without help (Lk 10:40). In the passive to remain behind (1Th 3:1+, John 8:9). To leave alone in the sense of disregard as describing those who sail past a place without stopping (Acts 21:3) **Kataleipo** can mean to cease an activity (eg, give up a vice) but there are no uses with this sense in Scripture.

Matthew 19:6 “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, **let no man separate.**”

- **God:** Pr 2:16-17 Mal 2:14 Mk 10:9 Ro 7:2 1Co 7:10-14 Eph 5:28 Heb 13:4

Related Passages:

Proverbs 2:16-17+ To deliver you from the strange woman, From the adulteress who flatters with her words;
17That leaves the companion of her youth And forgets the covenant of her God;

Malachi 2:14+ “Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

Mark 10:9+ “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

SUPERNATURAL ADDITION: TWO BECOME ONE

So (therefore, term of conclusion) **they are** (absolutely) **no longer** ([ouketi](#)) **two, but one** ([heis](#)) **flesh** ([sarx](#)) - God's math supernaturally (and mysteriously) unites two individuals into **one** ([heis](#)) **flesh** ([sarx](#)). In God's eyes marriage is not a legality, a formality or a tradition (it is all of those in men's eyes) but is a supernatural arrangement initiated and carried out by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of two sinners, joining their hearts together.

What therefore God ([theos](#)) **has joined together** ([suzeugnumi](#)), **let no man separate** ([chorizo present imperative with a negative](#)) - **Therefore** introduces another term of conclusion which concludes with a commandment. Jesus appeals to the creation account as the foundation for the institution of marriage which was validated by the Creator Himself and originally intended to be a lifelong union between one man and one woman who were to be fruitful and multiply (Ge 1:28+). Notice the command **let no man separate** is a [present imperative with a negative](#) calling for this (separation, divorce) to not to occur. In Ge 2:24+ the call was for the man to “**cleave to his wife**,” the Hebrew verb [dabaq](#) meaning essentially to “stick like glue!”

THOUGHT - Try this little test. Take a picture of a man and a picture of his fiancée and glue them together. Now allow sufficient time to dry and the two pictures to firmly adhere. Then grab the edges of each person's picture and pull them apart. What's the result? I'll leave that for you to ponder, including the implications in real life! As an aside, when a professing Christian claims that the Lord led them out of a marriage this is a lie and makes God a liar.

Bruce on one flesh - The reference is primarily to the physical fleshly unity. But flesh in Hebrew thought represents the entire man, and the ideal unity of marriage covers the whole nature. It is a unity of soul as well as of body: of sympathy, interest, purpose." (See [The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

*Only God can make marriage
only God can break marriage.*
-- David Platt

Hiebert on what God has joined together - an abiding prohibition against man's disruption of the union which God has established. The statement marks the contrast between God's action and man's. Jesus asserted the indissoluble nature of marriage as the divine intention. Under certain circumstances, human sinfulness may make relief through divorce necessary as a lesser evil, but it is still an evil, because it is contrary to the divine intention. The phrase "saving for the cause of fornication" (Matt. 5:32; 19:9) shows that Jesus recognized one ground for divorce. But even then Jesus did not command divorce. Forgiveness and restoration are open and desirable for those who have thus failed in the marriage relationship. Yet Jesus recognized that the fornication of the wife had in reality already broken the marriage tie; the husband in sending away his wife only accepted the disruption that she had caused. Jesus was concerned with the sin that caused the disruption of the marriage relationship, whatever its nature. ([The Gospel of Mark: An Expositional Commentary](#))

Joined together (4801) (**suzeugnumi** from [sun/syn](#) = together + **zeugos** = yoke, pair, ([zugos](#)) couple, team (oxen yoked). Yoke together as animals (Eze 1:11). Figuratively pictures to JOIN TOGETHER, UNITE as HUSBAND AND WIFE (Mt. 19:6; Mk 10:9). The picture is a common farming metaphor of two oxen yoked together--- As oxen in the plough, where each must pull equally in order to bring it on. Among the ancients, they put a yoke upon the necks of a new married couple, or chains on their arms, to shew that they were to be one, closely united, and pulling equally together in all the concerns of life. **Zeugos** "hath yoked together," as oxen in the plough, where each must pull equally in order to bring it on. **ILLUSTRATION** - Among the ancients, they put a yoke upon the necks of a new married couple, or chains on their arms, to shew that they were to be one, closely united, and pulling equally together in all the concerns of life

Only 2x - Matt. 19:6; Mk. 10:9

Separate (5563) **chorizo** from **choris** = separately, apart from, from) in the active sense means to cause to separate or divide, to put apart putting a space between. The emphasis of **chorizo** (especially in its literal uses) is on distance. In the passive sense, **chorizo** means to separate oneself (put some space between), to be separated. **Chorizo** is used in 1Co 7:10 as the equivalent of divorce. Although in modern terms we speak of *separation* as distinct from divorce, the NT use of **chorizo** in the context of marriage always carried the idea of divorce. A pagan husband and wife who divorce break God's law just as surely as believers who divorce.

QUESTION - [What does "what God has joined together, let no one separate" mean? WATCH VIDEO](#)

ANSWER - The command "what God has joined together, let no one separate" refers to marriage and divorce. It is from Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce found in Mark 10:1–12 and Matthew 19:1–12. On one occasion, the Pharisees asked Jesus if it is legitimate for a man to divorce his wife. Jesus in essence answers, "No": "Haven't you read . . . 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" (Matthew 19:4–6; cf. Genesis 1:27; 2:24).

Jesus' point is that a married couple is something that "God has joined together." Marriage is not of human origin—it originated with God and is part of the way that God designed the human race to live. In saying "let no one separate" a marriage, Jesus taught that divorce is not God's plan. Once a couple is married, they have been joined together by God Himself, and the union is meant to be for life. This principle holds true despite the faith (or lack thereof) of the couple. When two atheists marry, they have been joined together by God, whether they recognize it or not. If God has joined them together, then no human being has the right to break that union.

Later, after Jesus says, "What God has joined together, let no one separate," the Pharisees point out that Moses allowed divorce.

Jesus agrees, but also points out that the allowance was made due to “hardness of heart” (Matthew 19:8, NASB), reiterating that divorce was never God’s original plan.

Jesus’ command against separating what God has joined implies that it is possible for a marriage union to be broken and for the one flesh to be separated by divorce. There is debate among Christians about whether [divorce is ever justified](#). Many (perhaps most) would allow for divorce in the case of unrepentant unfaithfulness on the part of one spouse (based on Matthew 19:9) or desertion of a believing spouse by an unbelieving spouse who no longer wants to be married to a believer (see 1 Corinthians 7:15). In these cases the marriage bond has been broken by unfaithfulness or desertion—a severing of something that God has joined together—and it is a tragic occurrence.

Even if the above exceptions are allowed, our culture and, too often, even the church seem to regard divorce as something far less serious than it is. If marriage were simply a human convention similar to a business partnership or club membership, then people would be free to enter and exit at will. Divorce is not simply two people deciding to part company; it is one or perhaps both of the marriage partners deciding that they will act decisively to end something that God intended to be permanent. That is a serious thing!

Related Resources:

- **BORROW** [Divorce and remarriage : four Christian views](#) by Wayne House
- See **Walter Kaiser's discussion of** Mark 10:11–12 No Divorce and Remarriage? from [Hard Sayings of the Bible](#)
- **BORROW** [Divorce and remarriage : biblical principles and pastoral practice - Andrew Cornes - page 208 discusses Matthew 19 \(CAVEAT EMPTOR! See review by Craig Blomberg in Themelios](#) - Blomberg concludes "If Cornes' views help salvage or reconcile marriages which otherwise would be legally ended, we can be grateful for his hardline though pastorally sensitive approach. But even in maritally conservative British Christian circles (at least *vis-à-vis* the US!), **influential evangelical pastors have declared his views to be pastorally unworkable. To the extent that Cornes scares people away from Christianity by his excessive conservatism, God's reign is unnecessarily hindered.** We can only hope the latter scenario will prove less common than the former.")
- [What does the Bible say about divorce and remarriage?](#)
- [What does it mean that “the two shall become one flesh” \(Genesis 2:24\)?](#)
- [Is physical abuse an acceptable reason for divorce?](#)
- [What are biblical grounds for divorce?](#)
- [Why does God hate divorce?](#)
- [Is the divorce rate among Christians truly the same as among non-Christians?](#)

Matthew 19:7 They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?”

- **Why:** Mt 5:31 De 24:1-4 Isa 50:1 Jer 3:8 Mk 10:4
- **And send her away:** Mt 1:19 Mal 2:16

Related Passages:

Matthew 5:31-32+ “It was said, ‘WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE’; 32) but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Mark 10:4+ They said, “Moses permitted a man TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4+ “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some **indecent** in her, and he writes her a **certificate of divorce** and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, 2 and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man’s wife, 3 and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, 4 then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.

Comment on some indecent from **NET Note** - Literally the Hebrew is “nakedness of a thing.” The

Hebrew phrase '*ervat davar*' refers here to some gross sexual impropriety (see also related note below on "**indecent**" in Deut 23:14). Though the term usually has to do only with indecent exposure of the genitals, it can also include such behavior as adultery (cf. Lev 18:6–18; 20:11, 17, 20–21; Ezek 22:10; 23:29; Hos 2:10).

NOTE ON "INDECENT" in Deut 23:14- Heb "nakedness of a thing"; NLT "any shameful thing." The expression '*ervat davar*' refers specifically to sexual organs and, by extension, to any function associated with them. There are some aspects of human life that are so personal and private that they ought not be publicly paraded. Culturally speaking, even God is offended by such impropriety (cf. Gen 9:22–23; Lev 18:6–12, 16–19; 20:11, 17–21). (See B. Seevers, NIDOTTE 3:528–30.)

QUESTIONING THE MOSAIC LAW ON DIVORCE

They said to Him - Remember the Pharisees are still testing Jesus and are not interested in seeking information from Jesus but condemnation of Jesus! And they were looking for loopholes to justify their sin and terminate Him!

John Phillips says "In the context of the sinless perfection that prevailed at the beginning, there could be no question of divorce. The need for it would never arise. But man is no longer living in paradise. We dwell in a sin-cursed world and we have fallen Adamic natures. Even believers, who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, feel the pressure of temptation. All kinds of evil can lurk within the marriage relationship. The Pharisees therefore responded to Christ's idealistic statement by appealing to Moses. (See [Exploring the Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary - Page 377](#))

"Why then did Moses command ([entellomai](#)) to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE ([biblion](#)) OF DIVORCE ([apostasion](#)) AND SEND her AWAY ([apoluo](#)) - The Pharisees conveniently bypass Jesus' teaching on Genesis and quote from Deuteronomy 24:1-4+. Notice their question begins with a major flaw -- Moses did not command divorce (see MacArthur below)! So what is this brood of vipers doing by asking this question? By pointing to Moses' allowance (not command) for divorce, the Pharisees sought to create a contradiction between Jesus' teaching and the Mosaic Law, undermining His authority as a Teacher and Prophet. And of course if Jesus dismissed Moses' teaching, He could be accused of contradicting the Law. Since divorce was such a hot topic among the Jews, the Pharisees likely hoped He would respond in a way that would alienate either the permissive ([Hillel](#)) or the strict ([Shammai](#)) group.

Comment on Mark 10:4+ - They appeal to Moses to give the appearance of divine support for their liberal divorce customs. Ultimately they are seeking to put Jesus in conflict with Moses who was highly esteemed by the Jews. Note the word **permitted** which means he allowed them to do this (suffered them to do it). Note it does not say Moses *commanded* the practice, nor does it say Moses *condemned* the practice. Notice also how the Pharisees pulled this text out of context to make a [proof-text](#)! In other words, the Pharisees conveniently omitted the section in Deut 24:1+ which said "**because he has found some indecency in her**." They emphasized their "right" to divorce without mentioning the qualification Moses had stated! Slippery snakes!

David Guzik - The Pharisees thought that Moses was creating or promoting divorce. In fact, he was controlling it.

Charles Swindoll: In their response, they essentially argued, "If what You say is true, that divorce was not part of God's intention for marriage, then why would Moses —the great revealer of the Law —command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Here, they tried to pit Jesus against Moses —His words against the Law. Ignoring Jesus' argument from Genesis 1 and 2, they went back to Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The argument, in their minds, was compelling: If it were unlawful to divorce a wife, based on the words of Genesis, then Moses was breaking God's law by providing for divorce in Deuteronomy.

MacArthur explains what Moses commanded as alluded to in Mk 10:5+ - The **command** is simply that, if a divorced woman remarries and that husband divorces her or dies, her first "former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled" (Dt 24:4). It is to that commandment regarding remarriage, not a commandment to divorce, as some have supposed, that Jesus refers here and in Mark 10:5. Because the penalty for adultery was death, the indecency mentioned here obviously referred to some kind of sexual looseness or lewdness that came short of adultery. And it was because such indecency, vile as it might have been, was not sufficient grounds for divorce that the divorced wife was defiled by remarriage and could not be taken back by her first husband. Because her divorce to her first husband had no sufficient grounds and thus was invalid, she became an adulteress, and therefore defiled, when she married again. That is why John the Baptist declared that [Herod Antipas](#) and [Herodias](#) were living in adultery. In God's sight, she was still "the wife of his brother Philip" (Matt. 14:3-4). For the first husband to take back a defiled woman would be unholy. (See [Matthew Commentary - Page 168](#))

D Edmond Hiebert comments that the Pharisees "pointed out the law's procedure for divorce: that if they wanted to put away a

wife, repudiate her, and terminate the marriage, they were to write a bill of divorcement, prepare a written divorce certificate as the formal instrument for her dismissal. **Their statement emphasized the privilege of divorce but did not mention the legal restrictions Moses had stipulated. They were interested in the legal aspect of the issue—the law’s provision for the practice of divorce—but not in its deeper moral aspect. They were more concerned with their own rights within the limits of the law than with the matter of God’s will when facing the problem of divorce. The Mosaic legislation did not establish or sanction divorce but simply recognized the husband’s right to put away his wife under certain conditions.** It was intended to put a restraint upon an evil practice to prevent worse situations from arising. The requirement to write a bill of divorce made it necessary for the husband to state a formal reason for the action. Matthew noted that he had “to give” the wife the written divorce. For a valid divorce, the bill of divorcement must be written and delivered to the repudiated wife. The requirement restrained the rash and heartless dismissal of a wife and served to give the wife so treated at least some character and protection.” ([The Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary](#))

D. A. Carson: But what was the “indecent” in Moses’ day that allowed for divorce? “Something indecent” could not be equated with adultery, for the normal punishment for that was death, not divorce (Dt 22:22)—though it is not at all clear that the death penalty was in fact regularly imposed for adultery (cf. Henry McKeating, “Sanctions against Adultery in Ancient Israelite Society,” JSOT 11 [1979]: 57–72). Nor could the indecency be suspicion of adultery, for which the prescribed procedure was the bitter-water rite (Nu 5:11–31). Yet the indecency must have been shocking. Ancient Israel took marriage seriously. The best assumption is that the indecency was any lewd, immoral behavior, sometimes including, but not restricted to, adultery—e.g., homosexuality or sexual misconduct that fell short of intercourse.

NET NOTE - A quotation from Deut 24:1. The Pharisees were all in agreement that the OT permitted a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce his wife (not vice-versa) and that remarriage was therefore sanctioned. But the two rabbinic schools of Shammai and Hillel differed on the grounds for divorce. Shammai was much stricter than Hillel and permitted divorce only in the case of sexual immorality. Hillel permitted divorce for almost any reason (cf. the Mishnah, m. Gittin 9.10).

NET NOTE - ‡ Although the majority of witnesses (B C W 078 087 f13 33 syp,h) have ατὴν (autēn, “her”) after the infinitive πολσαι (apolusai, “to divorce”), a variant lacks the ατὴν. This shorter reading may be due to assimilation to the Markan parallel, but since it is attested in early and diverse witnesses (x D L Z Θ f1 579 700 pc lat) and since the parallel verse (Mark 10:4) already departs at many points, the shorter reading seems more likely to be original. The pronoun has been included in the translation, however, for clarity. NA27 includes the word in brackets, indicating reservations regarding its authenticity.

Spurgeon - Every reader of the passage in the books of Moses which is here referred to will be struck with the Pharisees’ unfair rendering of it. In Deuteronomy 24:1,2, we read: “When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man’s wife.” Moses commanded nothing in this instance; but barely tolerated, and greatly limited a custom then in vogue. To set Moses against Moses is not a new device; but the Pharisees would hardly venture to set Moses against God, and make him command an alteration of a divine law ordained from the beginning; yet our Lord made them see that they would have to do this to maintain the theory of easy divorce. The fact is, that Moses found divorce in existence to an almost unlimited extent, and he wisely commenced its overthrow by curtailing the custom rather than by absolutely forbidding it at once. They were not allowed to send away a wife with a hasty word, but must make a deliberate, solemn ceremonial of it by preparing and giving a writing of divorcement; and this was only allowed in a special case: “because he hath found some uncleanness in her.” Although many of the Pharisees spirited away this last limitation, and considered that the enactment in Deuteronomy sanctioned almost unlimited divorce, they were not unanimous in the matter, and were perpetually disputing over it. Hence there were many ways in which our Lord’s decision could be turned against him, whatever it might be. (See Matthew 19 Commentary)

Divorce (647) (apostasion from [aphistemi](#), to depart or stand away from) A departure, a divorce or dismissal of a woman from her husband, the deed or instrument of such divorce Mt. 5:31; 19:7 In Mk10:4, [biblion](#), a book or document, apostasiou, of dismissal reference to document spoken about in Dt. 24:1-4

APOSTASION 3V- Matt. 5:31; Matt. 19:7; Mk. 10:4

APOSTASION in the Septuagint - Deut. 24:1; Deut. 24:3; Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8;

Matthew 19:8 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.

- **because:** Ps 95:8 Zec 7:12 Mal 2:13,14 Mk 10:5

- **Moses permitted:** Mt 3:15 8:31 1Co 7:6
- **but from the beginning:** Ge 2:24 7:7 Jer 6:16

THE HEART OF THEIR PROBLEM WAS THE HARDNESS OF THEIR HEART

Van Parunak: The Pharisees want the Lord to comment on Deuteronomy 24 and divorce. The Lord deflects their attention to Genesis 3 and marriage. Frustrated, they try to pull him back to Deuteronomy. They carelessly drop their guard, and show their real attitude toward the passage by calling it a command. Matthew records this part of the conversation (Mt 19:7-8) The Lord answers, not by opposing Moses, but by opposing their interpretation. They claim, "Moses commanded." He responds, "Moses allowed." Moses' legislation does not command divorce. It only makes allowance for it, by telling people what to do if they are divorced. The Pharisees see divorce as a right guaranteed by the Law, following the three law interpretation of Deuteronomy 24. The Lord says that it merely makes provision for man's sin. He supports the interpretation of the entire paragraph as a single command.

He *said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart ([sklerokardia](#)) - Because is a term of explanation. In this case, what is being explained follows. Jesus is explaining why Moses permitted divorce and the explanation is their hard hearts! Thus Jesus directly attacks the heart of the problem explaining it is the problem of their hearts. Their hearts were hardened to God's truth (especially the truth about marriage in Genesis 1-2). Stephen addressing a group of antagonistic Jews in Acts 7:51+ declared "You (JEWISH) men who are **stiff-necked** and **uncircumcised in heart** and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did." Their heart problem was that it was uncircumcised and thus was hardened to God's will and way.

*The basic cause of divorce
is the hardness of the human heart.*

As noted below this same Greek word [sklerokardia](#) is used in Dt 10:16+ and Jer 4:4 where it is equated with an "**uncircumcised heart**," that is an unbelieving heart which has never wholly submitted to God's Word and thus was never genuinely "saved" (as we would call it today). (See Excursus on [Circumcision](#))

R T France has a helpful note on **hardness of heart** - "The thought is not so much of the cruelty of men to their wives, as of their unresponsiveness to the mind and will of God." (See [The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary](#))

David Guzik adds on **hardness of heart** - "Sometimes the heart of the offending party is hard, and they will not do what must be done to reconcile the relationship. Sometimes the heart of the offended party is hard, and they refuse to reconcile and get past the offence even when there is contrition and repentance. Often the hardness of heart is on both sides.

Moses permitted ([epitrepo](#)) you to divorce ([apoluo](#)) your wives; but from the beginning ([arche](#)) it has not been this way - Jesus does not argue with Deut 24:1-4 and indirectly confirms the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy. Moses' concession was because of their sinfulness and he only indirectly and reluctantly permitted divorce. What did Jesus mean by the time phrase **from the beginning**? In context Jesus has just quoted from Genesis, so that this would refer to the **beginning** of creation where God emphasized the sacred, lifelong nature of marriage.

Phillips - The original institution of marriage contained no provision for divorce. Initially marriage was not a civil contract made by man. Marriage was God's plan for the human race. It was not something that man could repeal or dissolve. The concept of marriage here restated by the Lord was the divine ideal. It is still the divine ideal. Marriage is for the benefit of man and woman, for the sanctifying of the most intimate of all human relationships, for the protection of the children resulting from the marriage, and for the health of society. (See [Exploring the Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary - Page 377](#))

Spurgeon - Moses tolerated and circumscribed an evil custom which he knew that such a people would not relinquish after its having been established among them for so long a time. They could not bear a higher law, and so he treated them as persons diseased with hardness of heart, hoping to lead them back to an older and better state of things by possible stages. As impurity ceased, and as the spirit of true religion would influence the nation, the need for divorce, and even the least desire for it, would die out. There was no provision in paradise for Adam's putting away Eve; there was no desire for divorce in the golden age. The enactment of the Mosaic law of divorce was modern and temporary; and in the form into which a loose interpretation of Scripture had distorted it, it was not defensible. (See Matthew 19 Commentary)

TECHNICAL NET NOTE - A few important MSS (ⲛ Ⲣ ⲡⲥ) have the name "Jesus" here, but it is probably not original. Nevertheless, this translation routinely specifies the referents of pronouns to improve clarity, so that has been done here.

Hardness of heart ([4641](#)) [sklerokardia](#) from [skleros](#) = hard + [kardia](#) = heart) is a stubborn attitude toward changing one's behavior, a hardness of heart, stubbornness, insensitivity, an unyielding frame of mind, hardness of heart, obstinacy, perverseness,

coldness, stubbornness Matt. 19:8; Mk. 10:5; Mk. 16:14. There are two very interesting uses in the [Septuagint](#) - it is notable that the book of Deuteronomy was written to the generation of Israel that entered the promised land and Jeremiah was written to Judah at the time of the destruction of the Temple and exile to Babylon. Here is the implied point - Israel (not every Jewish person of course - there was always a [believing remnant](#)) for the most part was characterized by [sklerokardia](#) or "hardness of heart" from the **beginning of the nation until the exile and now Jesus says even to the first century**

Deuteronomy 10:16+ "So **circumcise your heart of your heart** (Lxx = circumcise the hardness of your heart = [sklerokardia](#)), and stiffen your neck no longer.

Jeremiah 4:4 "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And **remove the foreskins** (Lxx = circumcise the hardness of your heart = [sklerokardia](#)), Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Or else My wrath will go forth like fire And burn with none to quench it, Because of the evil of your deeds."

Ken Peterman: General observations about the use of hardness in Scripture:

- Hardness is associated with stubbornness (Acts 19:9). Stubbornness involves an unwillingness to accept truth and perhaps a turning from the truth itself.
- Hardness is associated with disobedience (Hebrews 3:8). Disobedience involves an unwillingness to receive the truth rather than an inability to understand it (John 6:60).
- Hardness is associated with selfishness (Matthew 25:24). Selfishness is a product of the flesh, not the Spirit.

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily - Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you....

This is a very profound principle, which is of immense value in dealing with Scripture. There were certain precepts and commands given to Israel, which are not of lasting obligation, because they were stages in their moral discipline and education. It would have been impossible to lift them suddenly from the degradation into which they had sunk in Egypt, to the glorious levels of Isaiah or the Sermon on the Mount: so God's dealings with them were graduated and progressive.

Such were the regulations about a plurality of wives, the keeping of bond-slaves, the treatment of captives, the destruction of their foes. With respect to these, our Lord says, Moses interposed a parenthesis of legislation, which was a stage higher than anything known among the surrounding nations, though it was not God's normal or original code.

What was true of Israel is true of us. We do not realize, in the first stage of our redemption, all that is included in the word "Sin." We are like men enveloped in morning mist, which permits them to descry only the bolder outlines of the cliffs around them, but as yet veils the minuter eminences or depressions. As the mist clears, surrounding objects become ever more distinctly defined: so that the know more of God, we know ourselves better, and realize what sin is, and come to see it where we had never guessed its presence. Thus we condemn today what we permitted five years ago. It is interesting to find in these words of Christ the germ of an argument which his apostle used afterwards in the Epistle to the Galatians with such marvellous force. He said the Mosaic dispensation was a parenthesis; but it cannot disannul God's primal institution (Galatians 3:15-17).

Matthew 19:9 "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

- **Whoever:** Mt 5:32 Mk 10:11-12 Lu 16:18 1Co 7:10-13,39
- **except:** 2Ch 21:11 Jer 3:8 Eze 16:8,15,29 1Co 5:1
- **commits:** Ge 12:18,19 20:3 Jer 3:1 Ro 7:2,3 1Co 7:4,11,39

Related Passages:

Matthew 5:32+ but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity ([porneia](#)), makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Mark 10:11-12+ And He *said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; 12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

Luke 16:18+ (**LEAVES OUT THE "EXCEPTION CLAUSE"**) "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.

Romans 7:2-3+ For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. 3 So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.

1 Corinthians 7:10-15+ But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband 11 (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. 12 But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. 15 Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.

JESUS GIVES GROUNDS FOR DIVORCING WIFE

And I say to you, whoever divorces ([apoluo](#)) his wife, except for immorality ([porneia](#)), and marries ([gameo](#)) another woman commits adultery ([moichao](#) - present tense - illicit sexual activity of any sort in marriage is adultery) - A man could divorce his wife if she was immoral and legally marry another woman. But if a man divorced his wife on other grounds and remarried, he was guilty of committing adultery in the new marriage. **Immorality ([porneia](#))** generally refers to any sexual sin committed after the betrothal contract. It is notable that in the parallel passage in Lk 16:18 Jesus left out the "exception clause" of Mt 19:9 (See "[Exception Clause](#)" below) It is notable also that Jesus in essence interpreted the phrase "found some indecency in her" in Dt 24:1+ as a reference to sexual immorality.

NOTE: As an aside the Septuagint translates "**indecentcy**" in Dt 24:1+ with the adjective [aschemon](#) which BDAG defines as "something that is not openly done, displayed, or discussed in reserved society because it is considered 'shameful, unpresentable, indecent', or 'unmentionable'....The word is applied especially to sexual matters.

I SAY TO YOU STATEMENTS OF JESUS - Matt. 3:9; Matt. 5:18; Matt. 5:20; Matt. 5:22; Matt. 5:26; Matt. 5:28; Matt. 5:32; Matt. 5:34; Matt. 5:39; Matt. 5:44; Matt. 6:2; Matt. 6:5; Matt. 6:16; Matt. 6:25; Matt. 6:29; Matt. 8:10; Matt. 8:11; Matt. 10:15; Matt. 10:23; Matt. 10:42; Matt. 11:11; Matt. 11:22; Matt. 11:24; Matt. 12:6; Matt. 12:31; Matt. 13:17; Matt. 16:28; Matt. 17:12; Matt. 17:20; Matt. 18:3; Matt. 18:10; Matt. 18:13; Matt. 18:18; Matt. 18:19; Matt. 19:9; Matt. 19:23; Matt. 19:24; Matt. 19:28; Matt. 21:21; Matt. 21:31; Matt. 21:43; Matt. 23:36; Matt. 23:39; Matt. 24:2; Matt. 24:34; Matt. 24:47; Matt. 25:12; Matt. 25:40; Matt. 25:45; Matt. 26:13; Matt. 26:21; Matt. 26:29; Matt. 26:34; Mk. 2:11; Mk. 3:28; Mk. 5:41; Mk. 8:12; Mk. 9:1; Mk. 9:13; Mk. 9:41; Mk. 10:15; Mk. 10:29; Mk. 11:23; Mk. 11:24; Mk. 12:43; Mk. 13:30; Mk. 13:37; Mk. 14:9; Mk. 14:18; Mk. 14:25; Mk. 14:30; Lk. 3:8; Lk. 4:24; Lk. 4:25; Lk. 5:24; Lk. 6:27; Lk. 7:9; Lk. 7:14; Lk. 7:26; Lk. 7:28; Lk. 7:47; Lk. 9:27; Lk. 10:12; Lk. 10:24; Lk. 11:9; Lk. 12:4; Lk. 12:8; Lk. 12:22; Lk. 12:37; Lk. 12:44; Lk. 12:59; Lk. 13:35; Lk. 16:9; Lk. 18:17; Lk. 18:29; Lk. 21:3; Lk. 21:32; Lk. 22:16; Lk. 22:18; Lk. 22:34; Lk. 23:43; Jn. 1:51; Jn. 3:3; Jn. 3:5; Jn. 3:11; Jn. 4:35; Jn. 5:19; Jn. 5:24; Jn. 5:25; Jn. 6:26; Jn. 6:32; Jn. 6:47; Jn. 6:53; Jn. 8:34; Jn. 8:51; Jn. 8:58; Jn. 10:1; Jn. 10:7; Jn. 12:24; Jn. 13:16; Jn. 13:20; Jn. 13:21; Jn. 13:38; Jn. 14:10; Jn. 14:12; Jn. 16:20; Jn. 16:23; Jn. 21:18

*He was saying that divorce that does not result **from** adultery results **in** adultery if there is remarriage.*

MacArthur points out that "In other words, the message Jesus wanted to get across to those exponents of easy divorce and remarriage is that illegitimate divorce followed by remarriage makes adulterers of everyone involved....Although in this passage and in Matthew 5:32 Jesus spoke only of a man who divorces his wife, the same principle applies to a woman who divorces her husband. That situation is not mentioned by the Lord because it was virtually unheard of. Although a Jewish man could divorce his wife on the most trivial grounds, "for any cause at all" (Matt. 19:3), a Jewish woman could rarely divorce her husband even on the most serious grounds. A divorce on any other grounds than **immorality**, that is, adultery by one of the spouses, is always illegitimate, regardless of which one initiates the divorce. Jesus here uses **immorality** and **adultery** synonymously. He was saying that divorce that does not result *from* adultery results *in* **adultery** if there is remarriage...The qualification **except for immorality** clearly permits the innocent party who **marries another** to do so *without* committing **adultery**. (See [Matthew Commentary - Page 171](#))

Henry Morris - The relatively easy divorce allowed in the Mosaic law was not intended in God's original economy (Matthew 19:8). The only allowable grounds for divorce according to Christ is adultery. On the other hand, Jesus did not even allow this exception in Luke 16:18. The conclusion would be that even though adultery or fornication are permissible grounds for divorce and remarriage, it is still better to salvage the marriage if possible (Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:10-15).

R Kent Hughes goes on to state that "If you divorce for any other reason and remarry, it is you who commits adultery. This is likewise the meaning of Jesus' similar statement in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:32....Jesus' teaching is plain to see. I have read everything I could get my hands on regarding these passages, and some of the views have been unbelievably convoluted. But this is where I return to the plain, unadorned sense of the text. Jesus means what He says! Some object that these exception clauses do not fit with Jesus' teaching in two other Gospel passages, Mark 10:11, 12 and Luke 16:18, which contain no exception clauses. Because of this, some have argued that Mark represents the earlier and the most pure teaching of Jesus, but Matthew contains a scribal addition (the exception clause) and is unauthentic. However, we must hold that it is authentic because none of the ancient manuscripts for Matthew omit it—all of them have it. Why the difference between the Gospels then? John Stott gives the answer: *"It seems far more likely that its absence from Mark and Luke is due not to their ignorance of it but to their acceptance of it as something taken for granted. After all, under the Mosaic law adultery was punishable by death ... so nobody would have questioned that marital unfaithfulness was a just ground for divorce."* The Lord Jesus Christ permitted divorce and remarriage on one ground, and one ground only: marital unfaithfulness. Notice that he permitted it—he did not command it. Divorce is never mandatory. Too often men and women eagerly pounce on the infidelity of their mate as the opportunity to get out of a relationship they haven't liked anyway. It's so easy to look for a way out instead of working through the problems. Jesus' exception clause should be viewed like this: No matter how rough things are, regardless of the stress and strain or whatever is said about compatibility and temperament, nothing allows for divorce except one thing, unfaithfulness. And then it is not to be used as an excuse to get out of the marriage. (See [Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior](#))

Spurgeon - Fornication makes the guilty person a fit subject for just and lawful divorce; for it is a virtual disannulling of the marriage bond. In a case of fornication, upon clear proof, the tie can be loosed; but in no other case. Any other sort of divorce is by the law of God null and void, and it involves the persons who act upon it in the crime of adultery. Whoso marrieth her who is put away doth commit adultery; since she is not really divorced, but remains the wife of her former husband. Our King tolerates none of those enactments which, in certain countries, trifle with the bonds of matrimony. Nations may make what laws they dare, but they cannot alter facts: persons once married are, in the sight of God, married for life, with the one exception of proven fornication. (See Matthew 19 Commentary)

D A Carson on **commits adultery** - "He agrees with neither Shammai nor Hillel; for even though the school of Shammai was stricter than Hillel, it permitted remarriage when the divorce was not in accordance with its own Halakah (rules of conduct)."

Marries (1060) (**gameo**) means to take another person as spouse, marry; enter matrimony of both men and women.

Gameo - 28x in NT - get married(2), marriage(1), married(7), marries(7), marry(9), marrying(2) Matt. 5:32; Matt. 19:9; Matt. 19:10; Matt. 22:25; Matt. 22:30; Matt. 24:38; Mk. 6:17; Mk. 10:11; Mk. 10:12; Mk. 12:25; Lk. 14:20; Lk. 16:18; Lk. 17:27; Lk. 20:34; Lk. 20:35; 1 Co. 7:9; 1 Co. 7:10; 1 Co. 7:28; 1 Co. 7:33; 1 Co. 7:34; 1 Co. 7:36; 1 Co. 7:39; 1 Tim. 4:3; 1 Tim. 5:11; 1 Tim. 5:14. Only once in Septuagint - Esther 10:3

Commits adultery (3429) (**moichao** from **moichos** = an adulterer) to commit adultery, be an adulterer. BDAG - 1. be caused to commit adultery, be an adulterer/adulteress, commit adultery 2. be guilty of infidelity in a transcendent relationship, be unfaithful, 4x - adultery(1), commits adultery(3). Matt. 5:32; Matt. 19:9; Mk. 10:11; Mk. 10:12 Septuagint - Jer. 3:8; Jer. 5:7; Jer. 7:9; Jer. 9:2; Jer. 23:14; Jer. 29:23; Ezek. 16:32; Ezek. 23:37;

Gilbrant - Sexual intercourse outside of marriage is sin for both the married and the unmarried. Not only is lust the moral equivalent of adultery (Matthew 5:27-30), but divorce can be the cause of adultery as well (Matthew 5:31,32). A man who divorces his wife (or a wife who divorces her husband, Mark 10:12) commits moichaomai, that is, "causes her to commit adultery." Thus sexual fidelity in marriage is required by God (Genesis 2:23f.; Exodus 20:14) and vindicated by Christ (Matthew 19:9).

Classic Greek - **moicheuō** and its Doric counterpart **moichaō** mean to commit adultery (with acc.). Sometimes they are used more generally, seduce a woman, violate; hence in mid. let oneself be seduced, in pass. be seduced to adultery. The derivatives include moicheia, adultery, harlotry (cf. porneia → Discipline); moichos, Adulterer; moichalis, first an adj. meaning adulterous, and, secondly, a noun meaning adulteress, harlot. Adultery was punishable already in the old law codes going back to the second millennium B.C., e.g. the Lipit-Ishtar Code, the Code of Hammurabi, the old Ass. laws (cf. ANET, 159 ff., 163–88). Every form of sexual relationship outside marriage was forbidden to the wife, for she was the real guarantor of the integrity of

the family and clan, and by adultery she broke her own marriage and she destroyed the integrity of the whole clan. A man on the contrary committed adultery only by sexual relationships with a married woman, i.e. when breaking into another's arrangement. At the same time traces of older concepts behind these legal views from different cultures may be detected: (a) adultery with a married woman involves an offense against property, i.e. the invasion of the area of another's possessions, and (b) the woman committing adultery opens the clan to the influence of evil powers. The punishment of adultery by death, ill-treatment or the payment of an expiatory fine was normally left to the private initiative of the wronged husband or of his clan. (See [NIDNTT](#))

The place of marriage in society -- Object Lesson: Show the congregation a thermometer and a thermostat and note the significant difference between the two. A thermometer adjusts to the temperature of its environment in order to measure it, but a thermostat actually sets the temperature. Sadly, Christians are often more like thermometers than like thermostats. Rather than working to impact culture, many Christians simply adjust to the changing culture. This is evident in the state of marriage in the United States today. Despite the clear teachings of the Bible with regard to marriage and divorce, many studies show a negligible difference between the divorce rate among Christians and non-Christians. One way for Christians to make an impact on society is to recapture God's view of marriage and to live it out.

QUESTION - [What is sexual immorality?](#) [WATCH VIDEO](#)

ANSWER - In the New Testament, the word most often translated "sexual immorality" is [porneia](#). This word is also translated as "whoredom," "fornication," and "idolatry." It means "a surrendering of sexual purity," and it is primarily used of premarital sexual relations. From this Greek word we get the English word *pornography*, stemming from the concept of "selling off." Sexual immorality is the "selling off" of sexual purity and involves any type of sexual expression outside the boundaries of a biblically defined marriage relationship (Matthew 19:4–5).

The connection between sexual immorality and idolatry is best understood in the context of 1 Corinthians 6:18, which says, "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body." The bodies of believers are the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). Pagan idol worship often involved perverse and immoral sexual acts performed in the temple of a false god. When we use our physical bodies for immoral purposes, we are imitating pagan worship by profaning God's holy temple with acts He calls detestable (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

Biblical prohibitions against sexual immorality are often coupled with warnings against ["impurity"](#) (Romans 1:24; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 4:19). This word in the Greek is *akatharsia*, which means "defiled, foul, ceremonially unfit." It connotes actions that render a person unfit to enter God's presence. Those who persist in unrepentant immorality and impurity cannot come into the presence of God. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8; cf. Psalm 24:3–4). It is impossible to maintain a healthy intimacy with God when our bodies and souls are given over to impurities of any kind.

Sexuality is God's design. He alone can define the parameters for its use. The Bible is clear that sex was created to be enjoyed between one man and one woman who are in a covenant marriage until one of them dies (Matthew 19:6). Sexuality is His sacred wedding gift to human beings. Any expression of it outside those parameters constitutes an abuse of God's gift. Adultery, [premarital sex](#), [pornography](#), and [homosexual relations](#) are all contrary to God's design. That makes those things sinful.

The following are some common objections to God's commands against sexual immorality:

1. It's not wrong if we love each other. The Bible makes no distinction between "loving" and "unloving" sexual relations. The only biblical distinction is between married and unmarried people. Sex within marriage is blessed (Genesis 1:28); sex outside of marriage is "fornication" or "sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 7:2–5).

2. Times have changed, and what was wrong in biblical times is no longer considered sin. Most of the passages condemning sexual immorality also include evils such as greed, lust, stealing, etc. (1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Galatians 5:19–21). We have no problem understanding that these other things are still sin. God's character does not change with culture's opinion (Malachi 3:6; Numbers 23:19; Hebrews 13:8).

3. We're married in God's eyes. The fallacy of this idea is that the God who created marriage in the first place would retract His own command to accommodate what He has called sin. God declared marriage to be one man and one woman united for life (Mark 10:6–9). The Bible often uses the imagery of a wedding and a covenant marriage as a metaphor to teach spiritual truth (Matthew 22:2; Revelation 19:9). God takes marriage seriously, and His "eyes" see immorality for what it is, regardless of how cleverly we have redefined it.

4. I can still have a good relationship with God because He understands. Proverbs 28:9 says, "If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination." We fool ourselves when we think that we can stubbornly choose sin and God

does not care. 1 John 2:3–4 contains a serious challenge for those who persist in this line of thinking: “We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.”

Hebrews 13:4 makes God’s expectation for His children crystal clear: “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.” Sexual immorality is wrong. The blood of Jesus can cleanse us from every type of impurity when we repent and receive His forgiveness (1 John 1:7–9). But that cleansing means our old nature and all its practices, including sexual immorality, are put to death (Romans 6:12–14; 8:13). Ephesians 5:3 says, “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.”

Related Resources:

- [Why is sexual purity so important?](#)
- [What makes sexual sin such a big deal?](#)
- [What is the biblical fix for sexual brokenness?](#)
- [What does the Bible say about sexual compatibility / incompatibility?](#)

QUESTION - [Is remarriage after divorce always adultery?](#) [WATCH VIDEO](#)

ANSWER - Before we even begin to answer this question, let us reiterate, "God hates divorce" (Malachi 2:16). The pain, confusion, and frustration most people experience after a divorce are surely part of the reason that God hates divorce. Even more difficult, biblically, than the question of divorce, is the question of remarriage. The vast majority of people who divorce either remarry or consider getting remarried. What does the Bible say about this?

Matthew 19:9 says, "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." See also Matthew 5:32. These Scriptures clearly state that remarriage after a divorce is adultery, except in the instance of "marital unfaithfulness." In regards to this ["exception clause"](#) and its implications, please read the following articles:

- [What does the Bible say about divorce and remarriage?](#)
- [I am divorced. Can I remarry?](#)

It is our view that, in certain instances, a person is allowed to divorce and remarry without being guilty of adultery: a person whose spouse commits adultery, for example, and a believer whose unbelieving spouse abandons the marriage. We are not saying that a person under such circumstances should remarry. The Bible’s instruction to divorced people is to remain single or be reconciled (1 Corinthians 7:11). At the same time, it is our view that God offers His mercy and grace to the innocent party in a divorce and allows that person to remarry.

A person who gets a divorce for a reason other than the reasons listed above, and then gets remarried has committed adultery (Luke 16:18). The question then becomes, is this remarriage an "act" of adultery, or a "state" of adultery. The present tense of the Greek in Matthew 5:32; 19:9; and Luke 16:18 can indicate a continuous state of adultery. At the same time, the present tense in Greek does not always indicate continuous action. Sometimes it simply means that something occurred (Aoristic, Punctiliar, or Gnomic present). For example, the word "divorces" in Matthew 5:32 is present tense, but divorcing is not a continual action. It is our view that remarriage, no matter the circumstances, is not a continual state of adultery. Only the act of getting remarried itself is adultery.

In the Old Testament Law, the punishment for adultery was death (Leviticus 20:10). At the same time, Deuteronomy 24:1-4 mentions remarriage after a divorce, does not call it adultery, and does not demand the death penalty for the remarried spouse. The Bible explicitly says that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), but nowhere explicitly states that God hates remarriage. The Bible nowhere commands a remarried couple to divorce. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 does not describe the remarriage as invalid. Ending a remarriage through divorce would be just as sinful as ending a first marriage through divorce. Both would include the breaking of vows before God, between the couple, and in front of witnesses.

No matter the circumstances, once a couple is remarried, they should strive to live out their married lives in fidelity, in a God-honoring way, with Christ at the center of their marriage. A marriage is a marriage. God does not view the new marriage as invalid or adulterous. A remarried couple should devote themselves to God and to each other—and honor God by making their new marriage a lasting and Christ-centered one (Ephesians 5:22-33).

QUESTION - [What is the exception clause?](#)

ANSWER - The "exception clause" is Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:32 and Mt 19:9 "except for marital unfaithfulness." It gives an "exception" for remarriage after a divorce being considered adultery. Matthew 5:32 reads, "But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, **except for marital unfaithfulness**, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery." Similarly, Matthew 19:9 reads, "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, **except for marital unfaithfulness**, and marries another woman commits adultery." So, what precisely is "marital unfaithfulness," and why is it an exception to Jesus' statement that remarriage after a divorce is adultery?

The meaning of Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 is clear. If a person gets a divorce and then remarries, it is considered adultery *unless* the exception clause is in effect. The phrase "marital unfaithfulness" is a translation of the Greek word *porneia*, the word from which we get our modern word "pornography." The essential meaning of *porneia* is "sexual perversion." In Greek literature around the same time as the New Testament, *porneia* was used to refer to adultery, fornication, prostitution, incest, and idolatry. It is used 25 times in the New Testament, most often translated "fornication."

The meaning of *porneia* in the New Testament seems to be the general concept of sexual perversion. Other Greek words are used to refer to specific forms of sexual perversion, such as adultery. With this meaning in mind, according to the exception clause, any participation in sexual perversion/misconduct is an exception to Jesus' statement that remarriage after a divorce is adultery. If one spouse commits adultery, or any act of sexual perversion, and a divorce results, the "innocent" spouse is free to remarry without it being considered adulterous.

Please understand, though, that the exception clause is not a command for divorce and/or remarriage. Jesus is not saying that if marital unfaithfulness occurs a couple *should* divorce. Jesus is not saying that if a divorce occurs due to marital unfaithfulness, the innocent spouse *should* remarry. At most, Jesus is giving allowance for divorce and remarriage to occur. In no sense is Jesus declaring divorce and remarriage to be the best or only option. Repentance, forgiveness, counseling, and restoration are God's desire for marriages damaged by unfaithfulness. God can and will heal any marriage in which both spouses are committed to Him and willing to follow His Word.

QUESTION - [What does the Bible say about divorce and remarriage? WATCH VIDEO](#)

ANSWER - First of all, no matter what view one takes on the issue of divorce, it is important to remember Malachi 2:16: "I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel."

According to the Bible, marriage is a lifetime commitment. "So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:6).

God realizes, though, that marriages involve two sinful human beings and that divorces are going to occur. In the Old Testament, He laid down some laws to protect the rights of divorcees (Deuteronomy 24:1–4). Jesus pointed out that these laws were given because of the hardness of people's hearts, not because such laws were God's desire (Matthew 19:8).

The issue of remarriage after a divorce is addressed directly in 1 Corinthians 7:10–11:

"To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife."

So, the biblical rule is that there should be no divorce and, if a divorce does occur, no remarriage.

We have two possible exceptions to this foundational principle, one of which Paul addresses in the same context: a believer abandoned by an unbelieving spouse "is not bound" (1 Corinthians 7:15). And Jesus says, "Except for [sexual immorality](#)" in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9. So, depending on the exact meaning of *bound* and *sexual immorality*, there may be some cases in which remarriage is allowable after divorce. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul's argument for the "unbound" condition of the believing spouse is based on who leaves—it is the unbeliever who [abandons the marriage](#), and the believer is an innocent party.

Taking a closer look at Jesus' words in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9, the phrase *except for sexual immorality* possibly gives God's permission for divorce and remarriage. Many interpreters understand this "[exception clause](#)" in Matthew as referring to marital unfaithfulness during the betrothal period. In Jewish custom, a man and a woman were considered married even while they were still engaged or "betrothed." According to this view, immorality during this betrothal period would be the only valid reason for a divorce.

However, the Greek word translated "sexual immorality" is a general word that can mean any form of sexual sin. It can refer to fornication, prostitution, adultery, etc. Jesus is possibly saying that divorce is permissible if sexual immorality is committed. Sexual relations are an integral part of the marital bond: "The two will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Ephesians 5:31).

Therefore, any breaking of that bond by sexual relations outside of marriage might be a permissible reason for divorce.

Jesus' teaching seems to be that [adultery](#) unties the marriage knot, but the allowance of remarriage is not explicit. In Matthew 5:32, the assumption is that the woman who is divorced will remarry, and Jesus seems to say that, unless her first marriage was dissolved by adultery (on her husband's part), her second marriage will make her an adulteress. Jesus also has remarriage in mind in Matthew 19:9. In both passages, divorce and remarriage seem to be allowed in the circumstance covered by the [exception clause](#), whatever that is interpreted to be. It is important to note that only the innocent party is allowed to remarry. Although not stated in the text, it would seem the allowance for remarriage after divorce is God's mercy for the one who was sinned against, not for the one who committed the sexual immorality. There may be instances where the guilty party is allowed to remarry, but they are not evident in this text.

1 Corinthians 7:15 may be another biblical "exception," allowing remarriage if an unbelieving spouse divorces a believer. The verse says, "But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace." The text is clear that, if an unbelieving spouse leaves a believer, the believer is free to accept the separation and move on with life. He or she is "not bound," indicating full liberty. The Amplified Bible translates the statement as "the [remaining] brother or sister is not [spiritually or morally] bound." The believing spouse can work for reconciliation (1 Corinthians 7:11), but he or she is not obligated to remain in the marriage.

*If desertion dissolves a marriage,
then is remarriage permitted?*

If desertion dissolves a marriage, then is remarriage permitted? The context of 1 Corinthians 7:15 does not mention remarriage, except in 1Co 7:11, which says a divorced person cannot remarry. But, if "the believing husband or wife is no longer bound to the other" (1Co 7:15NLT), then it is reasonable to assume that remarriage is allowed. It seems in 1Co 7:15 Paul is giving an exception to the rule of 1Co 7:11.

Some also claim that abuse (spousal or child) is a valid reason for divorce even though it is not listed as such in the Bible. While this may very well be the case, it is never wise to presume upon the Word of God. In cases of abuse, a separation is definitely in order and should occur immediately.

Sometimes lost in the debate over the [exception clause](#) is the fact that, whatever "sexual immorality" means in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19, it is an allowance for divorce, not a requirement for it. Even when adultery is committed, a couple can, through God's grace, learn to forgive and begin rebuilding their marriage. God has forgiven us of so much more. Surely, we can follow His example and even forgive the sin of adultery (Ephesians 4:32). However, in many instances a spouse is unrepentant and continues the immoral behavior. That is when Matthew 19:9 applies.

Looking to quickly remarry after an allowable divorce can also cause problems. It might be God's desire for the divorced person to remain single, even if he or she can biblically remarry. God sometimes calls people to be single so their attention is not divided (1 Corinthians 7:32–35). Remarriage after a divorce may be an option in some circumstances, but that does not mean it is the only option.

In summary, the Bible makes it clear that God [hates divorce](#) (Malachi 2:16) and that reconciliation and forgiveness should mark a believer's life (Luke 11:4; Ephesians 4:32). However, God recognizes that divorce will occur, even among His children. A divorced and/or remarried believer should not feel any less loved by God, even if the divorce and/or remarriage is not covered under the possible [exception clause](#) of Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9.

QUESTION - [I am divorced. Can I remarry according to the Bible?](#)

ANSWER - We often receive questions like "I am divorced for such and such a reason. Can I get remarried?" Or "I have been divorced twice—the first for adultery by my spouse, the second for incompatibility. The man I'm dating has been divorced three times—the first for incompatibility, the second for adultery on his part, the third for adultery on his wife's part. Can we get married to each other?" Questions like these are difficult to answer because the Bible does not go into great detail regarding the various scenarios for remarriage after a divorce.

What we can know for sure is that it is God's plan for a married couple to stay married as long as both spouses are alive (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:6). The basic principle concerning divorce and remarriage is laid out clearly in 1 Corinthians 7:10–11: "To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife." So, the foundational rule is that there should be no divorce and, if a divorce does happen, no remarriage.

Once we understand the basic rule that there should be no remarriage after a divorce, we can look at the possible exceptions to that rule. One possible allowance for remarriage after a divorce is found in Matthew 19:9—if the marriage ended because of adultery, then the wronged spouse may be free to remarry. But this interpretation is debated among Christians.

Another possible allowance for remarriage is desertion—when an unbelieving spouse leaves a believing spouse (1 Corinthians 7:12–15). In such a case, the believer is “not bound” (verse 15). This passage does not specifically address remarriage, however, and much depends on the meaning of the words *not bound*. Instances of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse would be sufficient cause for separation, but the Bible does not speak of these sins in the context of divorce or remarriage.

While God [hates divorce](#) (Malachi 2:16), God is also merciful and forgiving. Every divorce is a result of sin, either on the part of one spouse or both. Does God forgive divorce? Absolutely! Divorce is no less forgivable than any other sin. Forgiveness of all sins is available through faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:28; Ephesians 1:7). If God forgives the sin of divorce, does that mean you are free to remarry? In light of the command to “remain unmarried or else be reconciled” in 1 Corinthians 7:11, the answer would seem to be no, except in the specific circumstances mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7:12–15 and Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9.

Being [unmarried](#) is not a curse. God sometimes calls people to remain single (1 Corinthians 7:7–8). Singleness can be an opportunity to serve God wholeheartedly (1 Corinthians 7:32–36).

So, can you or should you get remarried? We cannot give a blanket answer to that question. Ultimately, that is between you, your potential spouse, and, most importantly, God. The only advice we can give is for you to search the Scripture and pray to God for wisdom regarding what He would have you do (James 1:5). Pray with an open mind and genuinely ask the Lord to place His desires on your heart (Psalm 37:4). Seek the Lord’s will (Proverbs 3:5–6) and follow His leading.

Related Resources:

- [Is physical abuse an acceptable reason for divorce?](#)
- [Does the Bible say anything about making a second marriage a success?](#)
- [What does the Bible say about adultery?](#)
- [What are biblical grounds for divorce?](#)
- [What is a certificate of divorce \(Matthew 5:31\)?](#)

Matthew 19:10 The disciples *said to Him, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.”

- Ge 2:18 Pr 5:15-19 18:22 19:13,14 21:9,19 1Co 7:1,2,8,26-28 1Co 7:32-35,39,40 1Ti 4:3 5:11-15

COUNTING THE COST OF THE MARRIAGE COVENANT

The disciples ([mathetes](#)) *said to Him, “If the relationship ([aitia](#)) of the man with his wife is like this, it is better ([sumphero](#)) not to marry ([gameo](#)) - Clearly the disciples “got it!” -- One man, one woman, one flesh, no divorce! They understood how serious it was for someone to divorce their mate. If the only ground for divorce was unfaithfulness, if none of the exceptions suggested by Hillel and Shammai were valid, it was better to stay single! As a result of their comprehension (and remember they were often slow to understand certain things, but apparently not this time!) and their shock (because they had been taught all their life about “easy divorce”) they remarked **it is better** ([sumphero](#)) **not to marry** ([gameo](#)).

As old **John Trapp** says “It is not evil to marry, but good to be wary; to look ere one leap.”

The disciples understood the solemn commitment involved in the marriage covenant. Marriage is not like buying something from Amazon and then calling to get permission to return it! The disciples understood Jesus’ intent that marriage was meant by God to be a lifelong commitment not to be entered lightly. They’re basically saying “*If you can’t get out of marriage easily, maybe it’s safer not to get married at all.*” (See my discussion of [Covenant: As It Relates to Marriage](#))

*Marriage is a covenant,
not a convenience.*

Ryrie - The disciples seemed to have understood that Christ was teaching a very restricted meaning of “immorality” and that He completely disallowed divorce of married persons. See note on 5:32. In turn, Christ acknowledges that the saying “it is better not to marry” is valid in some cases, and these are enumerated in verse 12--those congenitally incapable, those made incapable, and

those who wish to devote themselves more completely to the service of God (1 Cor. 7:7, 8, 26, 32-35). Celibacy is an acceptable option.

Spurgeon - They had come to look upon the ease of slipping the marriage-knot as a sort of relief; and on marriage itself, without the power of escaping from it by divorce, as an evil thing, or at least as very likely to prove so. Better not marry if you marry for life: this seemed to be their notion. Even his disciples, looking at the risks of unhappy married life, concluded that it were better to remain single. They said, "It is good not to marry;" and there was a measure of truth in their declaration. (See Matthew 19 Commentary)

NET NOTE - ‡ Some significant witnesses, along with the majority of later MSS (25 C D L W Z 078 f1, 13 33 lat sy samss bo), read ατο (autou, "his") after μαθηται (mathētai, "disciples"), but this looks to be a clarifying reading. Other early and important witnesses lack the pronoun (71vid x B Θ e ff1 g1 sams mae), the reading adopted here. NA27 includes the pronoun in brackets, indicating doubts as to its authenticity.

QUESTION - [Why did the disciples conclude that it is better not to marry in Matthew 19:10?](#)

ANSWER - While Jesus was teaching and healing in Judea, some Pharisees tried to trap Jesus by asking Him a loaded question about marriage and the Law of Moses. Jesus' response caused the disciples to conclude that "it is better not to marry" (Matthew 19:10).

The Pharisees, trying to trap Jesus in a dilemma, asked Him whether it was lawful to divorce a wife for any reason (Matthew 19:3). They were trying to get Jesus to contradict Moses so they could brand Jesus as a false teacher. Of course, Jesus shrewdly responded by answering them with Scripture. Jesus reminded them that humanity was created male and female and that marriage was God's joining of the man and woman into one flesh; thus, no person could actually separate what God had united (Matthew 19:4–6). Jesus appealed to the design of marriage, implying that divorce was a violation of that design.

The Pharisees thought Jesus had taken the bait, and they questioned further why Moses allowed for divorce (Matthew 19:7). Jesus' answer was perhaps not what they expected. Jesus explained that Moses' allowance of divorce was a concession because of the people's hardness of heart, but divorce was never what was designed (Matthew 19:8). Jesus further explained that, if one divorces for any reason other than immorality (or unfaithfulness) and [marries someone else](#), then he or she is committing adultery (Matthew 19:9). Matthew did not record the Pharisees' response, but the disciples concluded that it is better not to marry (Matthew 19:10).

Jesus communicated that God's standard is high. Those who are married become one flesh and are united by God in a unique way. Only [unfaithfulness](#) by one partner could warrant the other partner's divorce and remarriage—and even that was a concession. Divorce was not the ideal and was not to be considered the guaranteed privilege of disgruntled men. The disciples, accustomed to the notion that divorce should be easy, shrank back from the idea of being stuck in an [unpleasant marriage](#). According to Jesus' teaching, a man who is displeased with his wife has no way out, and the disciples conclude it would be better not to marry than risk a life of unhappiness.

In answering the Pharisees' question, Jesus reiterated the seriousness of the marriage relationship as God has joined the husband and wife. That union was also affirmed by the married persons by their covenant with each other. To violate the covenant would be treachery (see Malachi 2:14–16). This is why the disciples conclude that it is better not to marry. They understood from Jesus' words that the marital commitment is a serious responsibility. Divorce was legally permitted for almost any reason, but Jesus explained that the husband had a weighty obligation no matter how easy it might be to legally divorce his wife.

Paul later explains in Ephesians 5:22–27 that the husband is to love his wife fully and unconditionally (illustrating Christ's sacrificial love for the church), and the wife is to subject herself to her own husband (illustrating the church's response to Christ). These unconditional responsibilities are incredibly serious and should not be undertaken lightly. Just as the disciples conclude that it is better not to marry, it would be wise for those pondering marriage to recognize how important marriage is to God and how He designed it to be a lifelong commitment. Perhaps some might also conclude that it is better not to marry.

Matthew 19:11 But He said to them, "Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given.

KJV Matthew 19:11 But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.

BGT Matthew 19:11 ὁ ἐπὲν αὐτοῖς ὁ πᾶς ἄνθρωπος οὐ δύναται ἅπασι [τοῖς] ἀλλοῖς δοῦναι.

NET Matthew 19:11 He said to them, "Not everyone can accept this statement, except those to whom it has been given.

CSB Matthew 19:11 But He told them, "Not everyone can accept this saying, but only those it has been given to.

ESV Matthew 19:11 But he said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.

NIV Matthew 19:11 Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.

NLT Matthew 19:11 "Not everyone can accept this statement," Jesus said. "Only those whom God helps.

- 1Co 7:2,7,9,17,35

But He said to them, “Not all men *can* accept (choreo) this statement (logos) - What statement? That some are called to be married and remain married whereas others who cannot receive this statement are called to be single.

Spurgeon - It may be better in some respects not to marry; but all men cannot receive this saying, and put it into practice: it would be the end of the race if they could. A single life is not for all, nor for many: nature forbids. To some, celibacy is better than marriage; but such are peculiar in constitution, or in circumstances. Abstinence from marriage is to a few a choice gift, answering high purposes; but to the many, marriage is as necessary as it is honorable. (See Matthew 19 Commentary)

But only those to whom it has been given - Jesus says those who can accept that is better not to marry are those given the gift of celibacy or were made eunuchs and as such did not have normal sexual desires.

John Phillips adds "The Lord's response to His disciples was swift and to the point. Aware of the fact that not all people can live up to His teaching on marriage and divorce, the Lord said to His friends, "*All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.*" The Lord recognized two things: (1) the absolute sanctity of marriage, including the importance of safeguarding it from any attempt to tear it down or devalue it; and (2) the sad but undeniable fact that, apart from God's special grace, not all people, not even all His own people, can accept the disciplines demanded by the ideal. Certainly we are not to force those disciplines, as a rule of faith, on other people. The Lord did not slight those who do not have what it takes to receive His teaching. Nor did He give us authority to sit in judgment on those who find His standards too high.

QUESTION - [Does the Bible teach that there is a gift of celibacy?](#)

ANSWER - Two passages in the New Testament are typically used to discuss what is sometimes called "the gift of celibacy." The first is Matthew 19:9–12,

"I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.' The disciples said to him, 'If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.' 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.'"

The phrase *only those to whom it has been given* refers to people receiving what some call "the gift of celibacy" or "the gift of singleness." Regardless of what we call the gift, Jesus teaches that most people do not naturally desire to remain single and celibate for a lifetime. Of the exceptions, two are physical, and one is ethical or religious:

- 1) some forego marriage due to their natural constitution—they are born with no desire to marry;
- 2) some do not marry because of some violent act perpetrated upon them by others; and
- 3) some, by the grace of God, have chosen to renounce marriage for the kingdom's sake. Such celibates have received a special gift from God.

*The ability to stay single and serve God
apart from marriage is a gift.*

The other pertinent passage is 1 Corinthians 7. In this chapter Paul states that it is not wrong to get married, but that it is better if a Christian can stay single. (The reason is that a married man's attention is "divided" between pleasing the Lord and pleasing his wife; a single man is free to be more focused on the Lord's work, 1Co 7:32-34.) Paul says, "I wish that all men were [unmarried] as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that" (1Co 7:7). Paul is careful to state that this is "a concession, not . . . a command" (verse 6). The ability to stay single and serve God apart from marriage is a gift. Paul and some others had this gift, but not everyone.

As we see, the Bible does not explicitly call this “the gift of celibacy,” but it does express that the ability to remain unmarried to serve God more fully is a gift. Most adults desire marriage, and this desire is not sinful. In fact, marriage can keep us from sin:

“Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband”
(1 Corinthians 7:2).

Rather than engage in immorality, believers are to be married. Sex within marriage between one man and one woman or celibate singleness—these are the only two options for Christians.

Although the Bible does speak of celibacy as a gift, it is not listed with the spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12). Singleness is a gift that God gives everyone, at least temporarily. For some, the gift of singleness is permanent; for others, God takes that gift away and gives the gift of marriage in its place. The Bible encourages those who are celibate in Christian service that they are an important part of God’s family.

Related Resources:

- [What does the Bible say about a Christian staying single?](#)
- [What does the Bible say about asexuality?](#)

Matthew 19:12 “For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.”

KJV Matthew 19:12 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.

BGT Matthew 19:12 ε σ ν γ ρ ε νο χοι ο τινες κ κοι λ ας μητρ ς γενν θησαν ο τως, κα ε σ ν ε νο χοι ο τινες ε νουχ σθησαν π τ ν νθρ πων, κα ε σ ν ε νο χοι ο τινες ε νο χισαν αυτο ς δι τ ν βασιλε αν τ ν ο ραν ν. δυν μενος χωρε ν χωρε τω.

NET Matthew 19:12 For there are some eunuchs who were that way from birth, and some who were made eunuchs by others, and some who became eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who is able to accept this should accept it."

CSB Matthew 19:12 For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb, there are eunuchs who were made by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves that way because of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can."

ESV Matthew 19:12 For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."

NIV Matthew 19:12 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."

NLT Matthew 19:12 Some are born as eunuchs, some have been made eunuchs by others, and some choose not to marry for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can."

NRS Matthew 19:12 For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can."

NJB Matthew 19:12 There are eunuchs born so from their mother’s womb, there are eunuchs made so by human agency and there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.'

NAB Matthew 19:12 Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it."

YLT Matthew 19:12 for there are eunuchs who from the mother's womb were so born; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are eunuchs who kept themselves eunuchs because of the reign of the heavens: he who is able to receive it -- let him receive.'

MIT Matthew 19:12 There are some eunuchs who come forth from their mother's womb celibate. Then there are those who are eunuchs because their gonads have been altered by men. Additionally, there are those who for the sake of the kingdom of heaven have chosen the celibate life. Let him who has the capacity to apply this principle, apply it."

GWN Matthew 19:12 For example, some men are celibate because they were born that way. Others are celibate because they were castrated. Still others have decided to be celibate because of the kingdom of heaven. If anyone can do what you've suggested, then he should do it."

BBE Matthew 19:12 For there are men who, from birth, were without sex: and there are some who were made so by men: and there are others who have made themselves so for the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to take it, let him take it.

- **which were made:** Isa 39:7 56:3,4
- which have: 1Co 7:32-38 9:5,15

Related Passages:

1 Corinthians 7:32-35+ But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; 33 but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. 35 This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.

For - Term of explanation. He is explaining those who have the "gift of singleness," and gives 3 groups.

There are eunuchs who were born ([gennao](#)) that way from their mother's womb ([koilia](#)); and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs ([eunouchizo](#)) by men - A **eunuch** is an emasculated male, a man with no testicles, either by birth or by act of men. In the Orient individuals who were made eunuchs belonged to a special class (e.g., Ethiopian eunuch Acts 8:26-40).

And there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs ([eunouchizo](#)) for the sake of the kingdom ([basileia](#)) of heaven ([ouranos](#)) - Jesus is not saying those **who made themselves eunuchs** subjected themselves voluntarily to castration. There is no command or encouragement in Christianity for physical self-mutilation. Early Christian interpreters (e.g., [see Origen](#)) misunderstood Jesus' words and took them literally, but this was rejected by the Church as unnecessary and misguided. Jesus is speaking figuratively referring to those who voluntarily choose a life of celibacy by not marrying and not engaging in sexual relationships in order to devote themselves more fully to the work of the **kingdom**. (e.g., Paul - 1Co 7:7-8 see commentary). In summary, the ability to remain single is given to congenital eunuchs, men castrated by other men to make their eunuchs or those who chose to remain single to be of more value to God's kingdom.

Spurgeon - Some have but feeble desires concerning marriage, and they were so born. They will find it good to remain as they are. Others subdue the desires of nature, for holy and laudable reasons, for the kingdom of heaven's sake; but this is not for all, nor for many. It is optional with individuals to marry or not: if they marry, nature commends, but grace is silent; if they forbear for Christ's sake, grace commends, and nature does not forbid. Enforced celibacy is the seed-bed of sins. "Marriage is honorable in all" Violations of purity are abominable in the sight of the Lord. In this matter we need guidance and grace if we follow the usual way; and if we elect the less frequented road, we shall need grace and guidance even more. As to a resolve to persevere in a single life: He that is able to receive it, let him receive it. (See Matthew 19 Commentary)

[Life Application Study Bible](#) ([borrow](#)) note - Jesus was not teaching us to avoid marriage because it is inconvenient or takes away our freedom. That would be selfishness.

He who is able ([dunamai](#)) to accept ([choreo](#)) this, let him accept ([choreo](#)) it - MIT "Let him who has the capacity to apply this principle, apply it."

Believer's Study Bible - This verse does not value celibacy or asceticism over the normal relationships of family life. Some are excluded from marriage by natural causes (v. 12a) and others by the violent action of men, i.e., they "were made eunuchs by men" (v. 12b). Some who serve the kingdom may discover themselves in circumstances in which they refrain from marriage or a second

marriage by their own choice (v. 12c).

Hindson - Unfortunately the early church began to take this statement to mean that it was more spiritual to be single than to be married, and eventually celibacy became legislation within the Roman Catholic Church. The single life is not to be forced on anyone. Those who are called to it are able to receive it (i.e., accept) gladly. (See [KJV Bible Commentary](#) page 2054)

Grant Osborne: The gift of celibacy is a valid option in the church. The disciples made an ironic statement that it would be better to be single (v. 10), but Jesus turns that on its head and says they are right. For many in ministry, it would be better to remain single and thereby have more time for kingdom business (cf. 1 Cor 7: 7, 26–35). This is as valid today as it was in the time of Jesus or Paul. We are all aware of those leaders who have chosen the path of celibacy (e.g., John Stott) and of the ministries they had as a result. Pioneer missionaries, evangelists, itinerant teachers, and many others should consider this gift as part of their calling. Most importantly, it is a calling and is not for everyone; Jesus does not elevate single status above marriage but rather says it is a valid calling for those in ministry. (See [Matthew - Page 708](#))

Stu Weber: No matter how one interprets Jesus' stance on divorce and remarriage, it was far stricter than the disciples (or anyone else) expected. They had lived all their lives in a society where divorces were granted liberally. The prevalence of arranged marriages and the tendency for women to be viewed as property may have contributed to the number of divorces. To learn that there was no easy way out of an unsatisfactory marriage caused the disciples to rethink the marriage commitment. They considered that it might be better to avoid the risk of getting into a bad marriage by staying single. The disciples' conclusion, given Jesus' high standards, was, it is better not to marry. Jesus had made his point.

John Piper - Jesus does not deny the tremendous difficulty of his command. Instead, he says in verse 11, that the enablement to fulfill the command not to remarry is a divine gift to his disciples. Verse 12 is an argument that such a life is indeed possible because there are people who for the sake of the kingdom, as well as lower reasons, have dedicated themselves to live a life of singleness.

NET NOTE - The verb [eunouchizo](#) occurs twice in this verse, translated the first time as “made eunuchs” and the second time as “became eunuchs.” The term literally refers to castration. The second occurrence of the word in this verse is most likely figurative, though, referring to those who willingly maintain a life of celibacy for the furtherance of the kingdom (see W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew* [ICC], 3:23).

Origen - The claim that Origen castrated himself originates from Eusebius of Caesarea, a 4th-century church historian, in his *Ecclesiastical History* (Book 6, Chapter 8) who writes “*Origen, taking Matthew 19:12 literally, castrated himself so that he could teach women and live a life of purity without suspicion or temptation.*” He reportedly did this while he was still young and intensely devoted to living out Christ’s teachings with radical sincerity. Later in life, Origen discouraged others from taking Matthew 19:12 literally and the act disqualified him from official ordination in some regions of the church.

ILLUSTRATION OF A MAN WHO CHOOSE TO LIVE AS EUNUCH FOR SAKE OF KINGDOM OF GOD - This man never married and God used him mightily to expand His Kingdom! His name was Francis Asbury (1745-1816) was a lower-middle-class metalworker from a rough neighborhood in the middle of the English countryside. After Francis Asbury heard the Methodist message of salvation marked by a life of discipline he volunteered to go to America as a missionary in 1774. Nothing about American religion would ever be the same again. Dynamic worship, energetic circuit-riding preachers, and a close-up, personal style of leadership made Methodism a movement perfectly suited to bring the word of God to the new nation of America. And Asbury led the way.

TRAVELING LIGHT AND WITH AN OPEN HAND Asbury never married or owned much more than he could carry on horseback. He told Henry Boehm, one of his traveling companions, that “the equipment of a Methodist minister consisted of a horse, saddle and bridle, one suit of clothes, a watch, a pocket Bible, and a hymn book. Anything else would be an encumbrance.” George Roberts, another preacher, recorded that Asbury left New York for Boston on one trip with only three dollars in his pocket and refused to take more from anyone on the way. **STARTLING STATISTICS** When Asbury first came to the American colonies as a 26-year-old Methodist missionary in 1771, there were 600 Methodist believers on the new continent. Fewer than 1 in 800 people was a Methodist. When he died in 1816, there were over 200,000 Methodists (1 of every 36 Americans), and Asbury had ordained over 2,000 Methodist preachers, nearly all of those who were preaching at the time. Despite poor health, he had ridden over 130,000 miles and preached for 45 years (an average of eight miles per day), probably delivering more than 10,000 sermons—approximately one sermon every three days. See [Christian History Magazine #114 - Francis Asbury and the Methodists](#)

Made eunuchs (2134)([eunouchizo](#) from [eunouchos](#) - one in bed alone, thus a eunuch) means to emasculate, make a eunuch and is used only in Mt 19:12 in the Bible.

[Complete Biblical Library](#) - This verb does not appear in classical Greek until the Fourth Century B.C., and it is

not used in the Septuagint. However, the Septuagint does use the noun *eunouchos* (2116) from which comes our English word *eunuch*. The idea of castration was basically alien to Western society until the great influx of Oriental culture which was a result of the extensive conquests of Alexander the Great (Schneider, “*eunouchizō*,” Kittel, 2:765). The Old Testament strictly forbids castration of both man and beast; it goes against the divine will in creation (Deuteronomy 17:16ff.; 23:2-9). The rabbis thus taught that marriage was obligatory to all males in light of Genesis 1:28 (*ibid.*, 2:767).

In the only New Testament use of the verb, Jesus transcended the rabbinic view. In Matthew 19:12 He set in contrast three examples of becoming a eunuch: (1) those who are so from birth, (2) those who are so as a result of other men, and (3) those who are so because of choice. The first two ways were the limits to the rabbinic understanding; the third way of becoming a eunuch had not before been elaborated by anyone, thus reinforcing the fact that the point of Jesus’ words rests there. This last way should be understood figuratively, not literally, for Jesus would have abhorred castration like all true Jews. He had in mind those who voluntarily forego sexual companionship in order to render total service for the Kingdom’s sake. (See also the word study for *eunouchos* [2116], “*eunuch*.”)

However, it is only fair to say that the Early Church was divided as to whether Jesus’ words were to be taken figuratively or literally (*ibid.*, 2:765).

Walter Kaiser's discussion of **Eunuchs for the Kingdom’s Sake?** from [Hard Sayings of the Bible](#)

This saying occurs in Matthew’s Gospel only; it comes immediately after his version of the saying about marriage and divorce. When their Master ruled out the possibility of their getting rid of their wives by divorce, the disciples suggested that, in that case, it was better not to marry. To this he replied, “Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given” (Mt 19:11 RSV). This means that the only ones who can successfully live a celibate life are those who have received the gift of celibacy. This context shows how the following reference to eunuchs is to be understood; it certainly shows how Matthew understood it.

The saying, as reproduced by Matthew, consists of three parts. The first two present no problem. Some men are born eunuchs, and as for being “made eunuchs by men,” that was no unfamiliar practice in the ancient Near East. The hard saying is the third part: what is meant by making oneself a eunuch “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (RSV)?

It is reported that one eminent scholar in the early church, Origen of Alexandria (A.D. 185–254), took these words with literal seriousness in the impetuosity of youth, and performed the appropriate operation on himself.¹⁶ In later life he knew better; in his commentary on Matthew’s Gospel he rejects the literal interpretation of the words, while acknowledging that he once accepted it, and says that they should be understood spiritually and not “according to the flesh and the letter.”

What then did Jesus mean? These words are no more to be taken literally than his words about cutting off the hand or foot or gouging out the eye that leads one into sin. In the Jewish culture in which he lived and taught, marriage was the accepted norm and celibacy was not held in the high esteem which it later came to enjoy in many parts of the church. That men such as John the Baptist and Christ himself should deny themselves the comforts of marriage and family life may well have aroused comment, and here is Jesus’ answer to unspoken questions. Some men and women have abstained from marriage in order to devote themselves more wholeheartedly to the cause of the kingdom of heaven. The man who marries and brings up a family incurs special responsibilities for his wife and children; they have a major claim on his attention. Jesus indicated his attitude toward the ties of the family into which he was born when he said that anyone who did the will of God was his brother, sister or mother (Mk 3:35). It was people like these—those who had taken on themselves the yoke of the kingdom he proclaimed—who constituted his true family. To incur the more restricted obligations that marriage and the rearing of children involved would have limited his dedication to the ministry to which he knew himself called.

At the same time, Jesus made it plain that only a minority among his followers could “receive” this course: for most of them marriage and family life should be the norm.

Twenty-five years later the same teaching was repeated in different language by Paul. Paul himself found the celibate way of life congenial, but he knew that the consequences would be disastrous if those who were not called to it tried to follow it. Hence his advice for the majority of his converts was that “each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband”—for, as he went on to say, “each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that” (1 Cor 7:2, 7). Those whom God called to the celibate life would receive from him the “gift” of celibacy—of making themselves “eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (RSV).

QUESTION - [What is a eunuch in the Bible?](#)

ANSWER - The eunuchs of the Bible were usually castrated males or those incapable of reproduction due to a birth defect. A eunuch could also be someone who performed work typical of eunuchs, although he remained perfectly capable of having sex—i.e., “eunuch” in some cases was simply a title. The purpose of intentional castration was to induce impotence and remove sexuality. It was a common practice in ancient times for rulers to castrate some of their servants and/or advisers in order to subdue and pacify them. It was especially common to castrate men who tended the royal harem. Queen Esther’s eunuchs are mentioned in Esther 4:4.

In Matthew 19:12, Jesus mentions eunuchs in the context of whether it is good to marry. He says, “There are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.” Jesus identifies three types of “eunuchs” here: natural eunuchs (“born that way”), forced eunuchs (“made eunuchs by others”), and voluntary eunuchs (“those who choose”).

Natural eunuchs include those who are born with a physical defect, but they also comprise those who are born with no real desire for marriage or sex. Forced eunuchs are those who have been castrated for whatever reason. Voluntary eunuchs are those who, in order to better serve the Lord in some capacity, choose to forego marriage. God calls some people to remain single (and therefore celibate). Paul speaks of those who serve the Lord in their unmarried state in 1 Corinthians 7:7—9.

Some gay groups argue that Jesus was referring to homosexuals when He mentioned eunuchs who were “born that way.” However, the Bible never uses the words homosexual and eunuch interchangeably. Furthermore, eunuchs are never referred to in Scripture as being in sin, while homosexuality is universally condemned in both the Old and New Testaments.

Matthew 19:13 Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them.

BGT Matthew 19:13 Τ τε προσην χθησαν α τ παιδ α να τ ς χε ρας πιθ α το ς κα προσε ξηται· ο δ μαθητα πετ μησαν α το ς.

NET Matthew 19:13 Then little children were brought to him for him to lay his hands on them and pray. But the disciples scolded those who brought them.

CSB Matthew 19:13 Then children were brought to Him so He might put His hands on them and pray. But the disciples rebuked them.

ESV Matthew 19:13 Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people,

NIV Matthew 19:13 Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them.

NLT Matthew 19:13 One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him.

- **brought:** Mt 18:2-5 Ge 48:1,9-20 1Sa 1:24 Ps 115:14,15 Jer 32:39 Mk 10:13 Lu 18:15 Ac 2:39 1Co 7:14
- **and the disciples rebuked:** Mt 16:22 Mt 20:31 Lu 9:49,50,54,55

Related Passages:

Mark 10:13+ And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them.

Luke 18:15+ And they were bringing even their babies ([brephos](#)) to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them.

COMMENT - A somewhat technical note on Luke 18:15 is that the material in Luke 9:51 to Luke 18:14 has no direct parallel with the material in the other Synoptic Gospels of Matthew and Mark. But in Luke 18:15-17 we find a definite parallel with the Gospel of Mark 10:13-16 and Mt 19:13-15. Luke has more duplication of the other Synoptic Gospels in the chapters that follow than we have seen in Luke 9:51-18:14.

JESUS LAYING & PRAYING FOR CHILDREN

DISCIPLES REBUKING

Then *some* children ([paidion](#)) were brought ([prosphero](#) cf use in Mt 4:24) to Him so that He might lay ([epitithemi](#)) His hands on them and pray ([proseuchomai](#)) - Luke's version has **babies** ([brephos](#)) (Lk 18:15+). Brought was used of bringing offerings to God (as an act of worship), and speaks of intentional presentation, often with reverence or purpose, as if one is "offering" these children to Jesus (cf our [modern practice of dedication](#) of children). Brought ([prosphero](#)) means to bring something toward someone — it implies effort, movement, direction.

David Guzik - The laying on of hands is used Biblically as a way to bestow blessing on another (Acts 6:6, Acts 8:17, Acts 9:17, 1 Timothy 5:22, 2 Timothy 1:6).

THOUGHT - As a child of God you can know that this same Jesus is praying for you even as I write this note (Ro 8:34+, Heb 7:25+) Do we appreciate and value the intercessory prayer that Jesus is offering right now on our behalf at the right hand of the Father? A good way to show we value it is by occasionally thanking Him for His intercession for our souls!

R T France - "It was a Jewish custom to bring a child to the elders on the evening of the Day of Atonement 'to bless him and pray for him' (Mishnah Sopherim 18:5)." (See [The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary](#))

Play this wonderful old tune (also includes 2 other children's tunes you may know)

[Jesus loves the little children](#)

All the children of the world
Red and yellow, black and white,
They are precious in His sight
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

Grant Osborne: This is the normal form for a blessing in the ancient world. Laying on of hands was used for parental blessing (Gen 48:14, 17–18), ordaining leaders (Num 27:18; Deut 34:9; Acts 6:6; 13:3), presenting sacrifices (Exod 29:10, 15; Lev 1:4), healing (Matt 9:18; Mark 6:5; 7:32), and giving the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17; 19:6). In Matthew the bringing of the children to Jesus recognizes his "authority as the one who determines human destiny" as well as his "mercy and compassion" for those who need his help. (See [Matthew - Page 711](#))

C H Spurgeon - From questions of marriage to the subject of children was an easy and natural step, and providence so arranged events that our Lord was led to proceed from the one to the other. We see how gentle was our King in the fact that anyone thought of bringing boys and girls to him. Their friends brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and bestow a blessing; and also lift up his hands to God, and pray for them. This was a very natural desire on the part of devout parents, and it showed much faith in our Lord's condescension. We feel sure that the mothers brought them, for still holy women are doing the same. (See Matthew 19 Commentary)

J. Ligon Duncan: This event seems mundane enough but it was important enough to the gospel writers that not only Matthew but also Mark and Luke took the time to record it, with Mark adding some details that Matthew and Luke do not provide. So its brevity belies its significance. There is terse truth in this passage that warrants our attention. Lesson: We must aspire to child-like lowliness and humility if we want to be in the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

William Barclay: To Jesus no one was unimportant. Some might say: 'They're only children; don't let them bother you.' Jesus would never say that. No one was ever a nuisance to Jesus. He was never too tired, never too busy to give all of himself to anyone who needed it. There is a strange difference between Jesus and many famous preachers or evangelists. It is often next to impossible to get into the presence of one of these famous ones. They have a kind of retinue and bodyguard which keep the public away lest the great figure be wearied and bothered. Jesus was the opposite of that. The way to his presence was open to the humblest person and to the youngest child. (See [The Gospel of Matthew - volume 2](#))

Charles Swindoll: By the rules of this world, the more wealthy, famous, important, and powerful you are, the less approachable, accessible, and available. None of us can stroll into the White House, knock on the door of the president of the United States, and ask for a few minutes of time to talk. If we were to see an Academy Award-winning actress dining at a pricey Hollywood restaurant, who of us would be able to slip into an empty seat at the table and ask about her next project? In our world, inaccessibility is a measure of importance. Not so with Jesus. As usual, He defied cultural expectations and turned the rules of the world upside down. He didn't favor the powerful, give special access to the elite, or make extra space for the influential. He was eminently approachable, accessible, and available . . . to everyone. Jesus was in touch with every kind of person —young and old, poor and rich, sick and healthy, corrupt and honest, harsh and courteous, hateful and loving, humble and proud, the devoted follower and the cruel critic. His

refusal to construct social barriers and to limit access is nothing short of astonishing. (See [Insights on Matthew 16--28 - Page 110](#))

And the disciples ([mathetes](#)) **rebuked** ([epitimao](#)) **them** - NLT - "But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him."

Warren Wiersbe - It was customary for the Jews to bring little children to the rabbis to receive their special blessing, so it is strange that the disciples would stand in the way...However, this was not the first time the disciples had attempted to "get rid of" people. They wanted to send the crowd away hungry, but Jesus fed them (Mt 14:15ff); and they tried to stop the Canaanite woman from asking Jesus to heal her daughter (Mt 15:21ff), but Jesus answered her prayer. The Twelve did not yet have the compassion of their Master, but it would come in due time. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

R Kent Hughes comments that "The disciples' motivations are not entirely clear. At best they were protecting Jesus from what they deemed as interruptions or pressure. At worst they saw the situation as a waste of time. But whatever their motivation, Jesus used their intervention to give some of his most penetrating teaching and most often quoted words." (See [Luke: That You May Know the Truth](#))

Paul Apple makes an interesting point calling us to "notice that in both episodes described in these verses, the disciples respond wrong -- 19:13b; 25. They have been with Jesus nearly three years and yet still they are not quite tuned in to His program. So these two episodes are designed to help straighten them out."

Spurgeon - The disciples, jealous for their Lord's honor, bade the mothers and nurses forbear. They judged that it was too childish an act on the mothers' part, and it was treating the great Teacher too familiarly. Were not the disciples the more childish of the two in imagining that their Lord would be unkind to babes? (See [Matthew 19 Commentary](#))

A T Robertson - No doubt people did often crowd around Jesus for a touch of his hand and his blessing. The disciples probably felt that they were doing Jesus a kindness. How little they understood children and Jesus. It is a tragedy to make children feel that they are in the way at home and at church. These men were the twelve apostles and yet had no vision of Christ's love for little children. The new child world of today is due directly to Jesus.

Kenneth Wuest - The rebuke of the disciples was both unwarranted and without result. They kept on rebuking those who brought the children as fast as they came to Jesus. The disciples, Swete says, "discouraged the attempt as idle or, more probably, as derogatory to the Master's dignity." (Borrow [Mark in the Greek New Testament for the English reader - page 198](#))

Hendriksen on the disciples **rebuking them** - For somewhat similar manifestations of unkindness on the part of the disciples see Luke 9:49, 50; Matt. 15:23. But this certainly was not Christ's attitude, or God's. See Mt. 5:43-48; 11:25-30; Luke 6:27-38; John 3:16.

NET NOTE - Greek "the disciples scolded them." In the translation the referent has been specified as "those who brought them," since otherwise the statement could be understood to mean that the disciples scolded the children rather than their parents who brought them.

Matthew Henry Concise - Mt 19:13-15. It is well when we come to Christ ourselves, and bring our children. Little children may be brought to Christ as needing, and being capable of receiving blessings from him, and having an interest in his intercession. We can but beg a blessing for them: Christ only can command the blessing. It is well for us, that Christ has more love and tenderness in him than the best of his disciples have. And let us learn of him not to discountenance any willing, well-meaning souls, in their seeking after Christ, though they are but weak. Those who are given to Christ, as part of his purchase, he will in no wise cast out. Therefore he takes it ill of all who forbid, and try to shut out those whom he has received. And all Christians should bring their children to the Saviour that he may bless them with spiritual blessings.

Brought (offered, presented) ([4374](#)) [prosphero](#) from **prós** = to, toward + **phéro** = bring) means to carry or bring something into the presence of someone usually implying a transfer of something to that person carry to, bring (to). To present something to someone. It often carries the sense of offering or presenting something intentionally, especially in a sacred or formal context. Thus **prosphero** describes an offering, whether of gifts, prayers, or sacrifices. Hebrews 9:14 - "Christ **offered** Himself (*προσφέρω*) without blemish to God." Matthew 5:23-24 - "If you are about to offer your gift at the altar..." In these contexts, *προσφέρω* refers to bringing an offering to God, either literal (like a sacrifice) or figurative (like one's life or heart). In both Old and New Testament contexts, *προσφέρω* is tied to worship — not just through words or songs, but through offering something real to God. In the OT, people brought lambs, grain, incense. In the NT, Jesus brings Himself. Today, we bring our hearts, time, obedience, and praise.

Prosphero is the verb used in the three synoptic Gospels to describe bringing children to Jesus (Mt 19:13, Mk 10:13, Lk 18:15). Of course the greatest offering/sacrifice in eternity is Christ's offering of Himself as the

sacrifice (Heb 9:14, 25, 28, Heb 10:12)

PROSPHERO IN MATTHEW - Matt. 2:11; Matt. 4:24; Matt. 5:23; Matt. 5:24; Matt. 8:4; Matt. 8:16; Matt. 9:2; Matt. 9:32; Matt. 12:22; Matt. 14:35; Matt. 17:16; Matt. 19:13; Matt. 22:19; Matt. 25:20; Mk. 1:44; Mk. 2:4; Mk. 10:13; Lk. 5:14; Lk. 18:15; Lk. 23:14; Lk. 23:36; Jn. 16:2; Jn. 19:29; Acts 7:42; Acts 8:18; Acts 21:26; Heb. 5:1; Heb. 5:3; Heb. 5:7; Heb. 8:3; Heb. 8:4; Heb. 9:7; Heb. 9:9; Heb. 9:14; Heb. 9:25; Heb. 9:28; Heb. 10:1; Heb. 10:2; Heb. 10:8; Heb. 10:11; Heb. 10:12; Heb. 11:4; Heb. 11:17; Heb. 12:7

Rebuked (warned) ([2008](#))([epitimao](#) from **epi** = upon + **timao** = to honor) means literally to put honor upon and then to mete out due measure and so then to find fault with, to censure severely, to rebuke, to express strong disapproval of, or to denounce (cp the incredible example in Mt 16:22). Note that one may **rebuke** another without producing conviction of guilt, either because, as in Mt 16:22 (Jesus rebuked by Peter, cp similar uses in Mt 19:13; Mk 8:32; 10:13; Lk 18:15; 19:39) the one rebuked is not guilty of any fault or the rebuke may be insufficient to produce acknowledgement of fault by the offender (cf the repentant thief's rebuke of the non-repentant thief on the cross = Lk 23:40).

Have you ever "sung" the hymn Gentle Jesus by Charles Wesley? I mean have you sung it as a child and come to Him as a little child to receive by faith His precious gift of eternal life? If not, may the Spirit of Jesus enable you today to sing this song from your heart, a heart filled with childlike faith and trust. Amen....

[Gentle Jesus, meek and mild.](#)

Look upon a little child.

Pity my simplicity.

Suffer me to come to Thee.

Lamb of God, I look to Thee.

Thou shalt my example be.

Thou art gentle, meek and mild;

Thou wast once a little child.

Fain I would be as Thou art;

Give me Thine obedient heart.

Thou art pitiful and kind.

Let me have Thy loving mind.

Loving Jesus, gentle Lamb,

In Thy gracious hands I am;

Make me, Savior, what Thou art,

Live Thyself within my heart.

Steven Cole ([Illustration](#)) - Evangelist Luis Palau tells of an incident during a crusade in Bolivia years ago when his day started with a breakfast where he shared Christ with a number of top government officials. He was looking forward to a luncheon with the Bolivian President. At mid-morning, he was in the middle of a press conference in his hotel room when there was a knock on the door. A team member walked in with a small Bolivian girl, about eleven, who had seen Palau on TV and was anxious to talk to him. Palau felt a bit irritated with the team member for bringing her into his room at a time like that, but he greeted the girl, picked up a book, signed it, and gave it to her. "Lord bless you, sweetheart," he said, as he began leading her to the door. She took two steps, looked back, and said confidently, "But Mr. Palau, I really wanted to receive Christ into my heart." Luis was caught up short. He dismissed the newsmen, sat down, and led that little girl to Jesus. Later that day he led the president of Bolivia to Christ. Both appointments were significant.

Like a Little Child

Read: Matthew 18:1–5; 19:13–14

Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:3

One evening many years ago, after saying a goodnight prayer with our two-year-old daughter, my wife was surprised by a question. "Mommy, where is Jesus?"

Luann replied, "Jesus is in heaven and He's everywhere, right here with us. And He can be in your heart if you ask Him to come in."

Our faith in Jesus is to be like that of a trusting child.

"I want Jesus to be in my heart."

"One of these days you can ask Him."

"I want to ask Him to be in my heart now."

So our little girl said, "Jesus, please come into my heart and be with me." And that started her faith journey with Him.

When Jesus's disciples asked Him who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, He called a little child to come and join them ([Matthew 18:1-2](#)). "Unless you change and become like little children," Jesus said, "you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. . . . And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (vv. 3-5).

Through the eyes of Jesus we can see a trusting child as our example of faith. And we are told to welcome all who open their hearts to Him. "Let the little children come to me," Jesus said, "and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (19:14).

Lord Jesus, thank You for calling us to follow You with the confident faith of a child.

Help the children in your life come to know Jesus.

Our faith in Jesus is to be like that of a trusting child.

By David C. McCasland | ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Steven Cole - I read about a missionary to Africa back in the 1950's who was appalled when she saw the native children at recess not run and play, but rather hunt mice and grasshoppers. They would impale them on a stick and roast and eat them. When she inquired as to why the children were so hungry, she found out that in that culture, the men ate their fill first, followed by the women. If anything was left, the children could eat. The children were considered the least important in that society. How unlike Jesus! He considered children important enough to give them His time and individual blessing. He wants us to learn from children what it means to believe in Him. He wants us to lead children to faith in Him. I pray that if you have never done so, you will come in simple faith to Jesus as your Savior. I pray that many of you will commit yourselves to the important task of leading children to Christ. You will be doing a work that our Savior Himself counted important.

Bring Them To Jesus

Read: Luke 18:15-17

Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. —Mark 10:14

The Scripture reading from Luke 18 about children seemed unusual at the memorial service for David Holquist. After all, he was 77 when he died.

Yet the pastor said the verses fit David, a long-time college professor, perfectly. Part of his legacy was that he took time for children—his own and others'. He made balloon animals and puppets, and helped in a puppet ministry at church. When planning worship services with others, he frequently asked, "What about the children?" He was concerned about what would help the children—not just the adults—to worship God.

Luke 18 shows us the concern Jesus had for children. When people brought little ones to Him, the disciples wanted to protect Jesus, a busy man, from the bothersome children. But it seems that Jesus was not at all bothered by them. Just the opposite. The Bible says that Jesus was "greatly displeased" at the disciples, and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them" (v.16). Mark adds that Jesus took them in His arms and blessed them (10:14-16).

Let's examine our own attitude about children and then follow the example of David Holquist. Find some ways to help them come to Jesus. By Anne Cetas ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

To those who are teaching the gospel,
With love in their hearts for its truth,
Comes the gentle reminder from heaven,

“Forget not the children and youth.”

—Anon.

God has great concern for little children.

Like a Little Child

Read: Mark 10:13–16

Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them. Mark 10:14

The little girl moved joyfully and gracefully to the music of praise. She was the only one in the aisle but that didn’t keep her from spinning and waving her arms and lifting her feet to the music. Her mother, a smile on her lips, didn’t try to stop her.

My heart lifted as I watched, and I longed to join her—but didn’t. I’d long ago lost the unselfconscious expression of joy and wonder of my childhood. Even though we are meant to grow and mature and put childish ways behind us, we were never meant to lose the joy and wonder, especially in our relationship with God.

When Jesus lived on Earth, He welcomed little children to Him and often referred to them in His teaching (Matthew 11:25; 18:3; 21:16). On one occasion, He rebuked His disciples for attempting to keep parents from bringing their children to Him for a blessing, saying, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14). Jesus was referring to the childlike characteristics that ready us to receive Christ—joy and wonder, but also simplicity, dependence, trust, and humility.

Childlike wonder and joy (and more) open our hearts to be more receptive to Him. He is waiting for us to run into His arms.

Abba (Daddy), Father, help us to be more childlike in our relationship with You. We long to be filled with wonder at all You have done.

Faith shines brightest in a childlike heart.

By Alyson Kieda

INSIGHT The wonder of what we see in Mark 10:13–16 becomes more stunning when we understand the connection with what follows in Mark’s gospel. One phrase that links the two sections is “the kingdom of God”—the rule of God in our hearts (see Mark 10:14–15). God’s kingdom (which includes eternal life) is the possession of those who are childlike in their dependence on God. They are the ones who are welcomed by Jesus (v. 16). On the other hand, we see a full-grown man running unhindered to Jesus, but he ends up leaving Him “because he had great wealth” (v. 22). Three times the phrase “the kingdom of God” is used in verses 17–27. “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” (v. 23); “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (vv. 24–25, emphasis added). Simple, childlike trust in Jesus is better than “adultlike” independence and trust in lesser things.

How can you be more like a child in the presence of Jesus? Arthur Jackson [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Matthew 19:14 But Jesus said, “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

- **Let alone:** Ge 17:7,8,24-26 21:4 Jdg 13:7 1Sa 1:11,22,24 2:18 Mk 10:14 Lu 18:16-17
- **for:** Mt 11:25 Mt 18:3 1Co 14:20 1Pe 2:1,2

Related Passages:

Mark 10:14 But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Luke 18:16-17 But Jesus called for them, saying, “Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 17 “Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.”

Matthew 11:25 At that time Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden

these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.

Matthew 18:3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

LET THE CHILDREN COME

But Jesus ([lesous](#)) said, "**Let the children** ([paidion](#)) **alone** ([aphiemi aorist imperative](#)), and **do not hinder** ([present imperative with a negative](#)) them from coming ([erchomai](#)) to Me; for the kingdom ([basileia](#)) of heaven ([ouranos](#)) belongs to such as these

Spurgeon - The Lord is more lowly than his servants. He bids them cease to hinder the little children; he calls them to himself; he declares that they are the very kind of people of whom his heavenly kingdom is made up. "Of such is the kingdom of heaven " — this is the banner of the Sunday school. Children, and those like them, may freely come into the kingdom of the Lord of heaven; yea, these are the characters who alone can enter into that kingdom.

NET NOTE - The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. Children are a picture of those whose simple trust illustrates what faith is all about. The remark illustrates how everyone is important to God, even those whom others regard as insignificant.

QUESTION - [Why did Jesus say, "Let the little children come to me"?](#)

ANSWER - At one point during Jesus' earthly ministry, some [children](#) were brought to Him so that He could lay hands on them and pray for them (Matthew 19:13). The disciples tried to turn the children away, but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (verse 14). Mark 10:14 (KJV) adds that Jesus was "much displeased" with His disciples for their actions. He then blessed the children (Matthew 19:15).

There are two potentially puzzling elements to this story. First, why did the disciples try to keep the children away from Jesus? Also, what did Jesus mean when he said, "Let the little children come to me . . . for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these"?

It is important to remember that children in Jesus' time were not necessarily regarded as special or particularly endearing, except to their own parents. Many cultures today look on children as especially sweet, innocent, and even wise. Jewish culture in that day probably did not see children in such optimistic terms. The disciples most likely rebuked those bringing the children to Jesus because they felt bringing children to Jesus was socially improper or because they thought the children would bother Jesus. It is likely that their move to hinder the parents from bringing their children to Jesus was motivated not by unkindness but by a desire to respect Jesus' position as a teacher. But Jesus wanted the children to come to Him. He said, "Let the children come," because He wanted to bless them.

It is wonderful to think of Jesus interacting with a child. Children are needy and dependent, and they know almost nothing about life. They function mostly on emotion rather than reason. Yet Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14). Scripture often compares believers to children (e.g., Luke 10:21; Galatians 4:19; 1 John 4:4). In fact, Jesus told those following Him, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3–4; cf. Mark 10:15).

Jesus' command to "let the little children come to me" reveals several truths: 1) Children need to be blessed by the Lord. 2) The Lord wants to bless children. 3) Parents should be encouraged to bring their children to Jesus at an early age and teach them His ways. 4) Jesus has regard for the weakest and most vulnerable among us. 5) No matter how compassionate Jesus' followers are, Jesus Himself is more compassionate still. 6) Those who come to Christ must do so in childlike [humility](#), [faith](#), and simplicity.

'Like children who implicitly trust their parents, believers trust God. Faith is not about knowing everything or doing everything right. It is about knowing that, no matter what happens, our Father will take care of us. That trust in Him, even when life is terrifying and sad and makes no sense, is what makes a believer like a child. "All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37). God loves His children.

Related Resources:

- [How did Jesus interact with children?](#)
- [What does it mean that Jesus loves the little children?](#)

Matthew 19:15 After laying His hands on them, He departed from there.

Related Passages:

Mark 10:16+ And He took them in His arms ([enagkalizomai](#)) and began blessing (kateulogeo) them, laying His hands on them.

JESUS LAYS HANDS ON THE CHILDREN

After laying ([epitithemi](#)) His hands on them, He departed ([poreuo](#)) from there Mark adds the detail that He **took them in his arms** and while the children were in His lap, He pronounced a blessing, probably in the form of a prayer, over them. This was most unusual for a rabbi to take time for the little ones. The mindset of the day would have been to not bother with the children. Teachers were too busy to waste time on them.

The Lord took children in His arms
To bless them and to show
That if we come in childlike faith
His presence we will know.
—Sper

G Campbell Morgan - He laid His hands on them. Matt. 19:15

This He did after He had rebuked His disciples for attempting to prevent their being brought to Him. The mistake was very natural, for they did not understand the strategic importance of little children in the Kingdom of God. All that, we learn from this chapter. Our Lord enfranchised the children, and this was symbolized in this act, as it was declared in His works. These hands were those of the King, the Priest, the Teacher. By their laying-on, the children were claimed for His rule, His redemption, His guidance. I have often wondered what became of those particular children. A great and reverent story might be written, making some one of them its hero or heroine. And yet everything would depend upon those who had the care of them afterwards. If they, the fathers and mothers, saw the real value of what took place that day, the children would enter into it all as the years went on. That is the real point of the story for us. So far as He is concerned, those strong and tender hands are laid upon the heads of all our children. Do we recognize that? If so, it will have its effect upon all our dealings with them. They are ours, but they are His by deeper, more sacred, more tender ties; and our principal responsibility concerning them is, not that we should have joy of them, but that He should possess them in very deed.

Childlike Humility

Read: Matthew 18:1-14

Whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. —Matthew 18:4

In the mid-70s, my husband Bill and I befriended a drug addict named Derek on the London subway. Days later we invited him to come and live with our family. He soon received Christ and His forgiveness.

Until then, the world had been shouting to Derek, "Why don't you grow up?" That day Jesus tenderly said to him, "Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 18:3). Derek became a child of God! We expected this young man to learn a lot through us about God, but little did we expect to learn about God through him.

For example, one afternoon we discussed the possibility of someday opening a Christian rehabilitation center for addicts. None of us knew when, where, how, or if it would ever happen. I said, "Well, we know God won't let us down." Derek, however, added, "God won't let Himself down." His words echoed Psalm 23:3, "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

Twenty eventful years ago He brought that rehabilitation center into being "for His name's sake," and I've been learning and relearning childlike humility ever since. How about you? Joanie Yoder ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

There's so much wisdom to be learned,
So many ways for me to grow,
Lord, I would listen like a child,
And learn what You would have me know.

—K. De Haan

If you're filled with pride, you won't have room for wisdom.

Leaping With Joy

Read: Matthew 18:1-5

Whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. —Matthew 18:4

One nice thing about having a young daughter is the frequent reminders she gives me about joyful trust. Debbie still jumps into my arms from the stairs, the porch, or the picnic table with a shout and a great big smile. We never have a long discussion ahead of time about whether or not I'll catch her. She just looks at me and leaps.

As adults, we tend to become more cautious with age. That may be all right in driving a car or spending money, but it is stifling in our relationship with God.

When the disciples of Jesus wanted to know who was greatest in the kingdom of heaven, the Lord pointed to a child as He spoke of conversion and humility: "Whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 18:4).

How I long to become more childlike each year with my heavenly Father instead of more hesitant, more calculating, more insistent that He guarantee the results before I'll take a step of faith. Rather than becoming more cautious as I age, I want to become more daring in my walk with God. Instead of being obsessed with landing safely and looking good, I want to leap with humble, joyful abandon toward my heavenly Father's arms. David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

I take my Father's hand in faith,
Though where He leads I may not see;
My hand is given into His—
I trust Him as my child trusts me.
—Shoemaker

Childlike faith focuses on our heavenly Father, not on our fears.

Child's Play

Read: Matthew 18:1-11

Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. —
Matthew 18:3

After a surprise storm blanketed the Middle East with snow, a newspaper photo showed four armed men smiling as they built a snowman outside the battered walls of a military headquarters. The wintry weather also caused a protest to be canceled and delayed a debate over parliamentary matters of pressing importance. Men wearing long robes and women in traditional black dresses and headscarves were seen playing in the snow. There's something about snow that brings out the child in all of us.

And there's something about the gospel that beckons us to abandon our deep hostilities and feelings of self-importance in favor of a childlike humility and faith. When Jesus was asked, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matthew 18:1), He called a little child to come to Him and said, "Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (v.3).

It has been said that age diminishes our imagination, hopes, and possibilities. The older we get, the more easily we say, "That could never happen." But in a child's mind, God can do anything. A childlike faith filled with wonder and confidence in God unlocks the door to the kingdom of heaven. David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

God, give me the faith of a little child!
A faith that will look to Thee—
That never will falter and never fail,
But follow Thee trustingly.
—Showerman

Faith shines brightest in a childlike heart.

The Children's Friend

Read: Matthew 19:13-15

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."
—Matthew 19:14

Today, people around the globe will observe the 200th anniversary of the birth of the great storyteller Hans Christian Andersen. The lessons and encouragement contained in his tales of The Ugly Duckling, The Little Mermaid, and The Emperor's New Clothes are still considered a great gift to children everywhere.

I'm reminded, however, that Jesus Christ is the greatest friend of children the world has ever known. No one has done more for them than Jesus.

When Jesus' disciples reprimanded people for bringing little ones to Him, the Lord said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14).

Jesus valued children as persons of worth. After His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Lord accepted the praise of children and reminded those who criticized them that God has ordained praise even "out of the mouths of babes and nursing infants" (Matthew 21:16; Psalm 8:2).

Companionship with the Savior is the privilege of everyone who trusts Him with the simple faith of a child. His loving arms and tender heart are ready to embrace every child who accepts Him. He willingly receives all who open their hearts to Him. He is the children's Friend. By David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

O Jesus, You who once did say
To little children at their play,
"Come to Me, you will be blessed,"
So come to us and be our Guest.
—Anon

The Creator hides secrets from sages,
yet He can be known by children.

Matthew 19:16 And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?"

KJV Matthew 19:16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

BGT Matthew 19:16 Καὶ ὁ ἐς προσελθὼν αὐτὸν εἰπὼν· διδασκαλε, τί γὰρ ποιήσω ναὶ σῶμαι;

NET Matthew 19:16 Now someone came up to him and said, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to gain eternal life?"

CSB Matthew 19:16 Just then someone came up and asked Him, "Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?"

ESV Matthew 19:16 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"

NIV Matthew 19:16 Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

NLT Matthew 19:16 Someone came to Jesus with this question: "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"

- **one:** Mk 10:17 Lu 18:18
- **what:** Lu 10:25 Jn 6:27-29 Ac 16:30
- **eternal:** Mt 25:46 Da 12:2 Jn 3:15 4:14 5:39 6:47,68 10:28 12:25 17:2,3 Ro 2:7 5:21 6:22,23 1Ti 1:16 6:12,19 Tit 1:2 3:7 1Jn 1:2 2:25 1Jn 5:11-13,20 Jude 1:21

Related Passages:

Mark 10:17+ As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "**Good Teacher**, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Luke 18:18+ A ruler questioned Him, saying, "**Good Teacher**, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Luke 10:25+ (CONTRAST THIS RICH YOUNG RULER WITH) a lawyer stood up and **put Him to the test** ([ekpeirazo](#)), saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

A GOOD THING TO DESIRE - ETERNAL LIFE

And - Surprisingly the NAS does not translate the important Greek word [idou](#) which is translated **behold**, a word used to grab the reader's attention. "Listen up!" is the idea. So literally it reads "And behold..." It is also surprising that most of the other modern versions do not translate the "**Behold**!" Why is this significant? I agree with **John MacArthur** who says "**Behold** suggests how unusual and unexpected it was that he would admit he lacked eternal life and come to Jesus to find it."

NET NOTE - Greek literally = "**And behold one came.**" The Greek word [δοῦ](#) ([idou](#)) has not been translated because it has no exact English equivalent here, but adds interest and emphasis (BDAG 468 s.v. 1).

Note that in the preceding context Jesus had talked about the **kingdom of heaven** (Mt 19:12 and Mt 19:14). He will bring up the **kingdom of heaven** toward the end of this story of the rich young ruler (Mt 19:23), to illustrate who enters the **kingdom of heaven** and who does not.

John MacArthur tells this story - During a flight I took some time ago, a young man sitting next to me introduced himself and said, "Sir, you wouldn't know how I could have a relationship with Jesus Christ, would you?" Now that sort of incident doesn't happen often! I was reading my Bible, which prompted him to ask the question. He seemed ready and eager to be saved. I said, "You simply believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and accept Him as your Savior." He said, "I'd like to do that." So we prayed together. I was excited about what happened but was later unsuccessful in my attempts to follow up his commitment. I have since discovered that he has no continuing interest in the things of Christ, as far as I can tell. Some of you who have shared the gospel of Christ with others have experienced those occasions where someone you led to Christ never shows change in their life. (**ED: I HAVE AND 3 MONTHS LATER THE MAN WAS IN A NUDIST COLONY!**) If you've been struggling with why that happens, then I think you'll find the answer in this lesson (on the Rich Young Ruler). (Full sermon [Matthew 19:16-22: How to Obtain Eternal Life](#))

J C Ryle points out that "THE story we have now read is three times reported in the Gospels (Mt 19:16-30, Mk 10:17-31, Lu 18:18-30). Matthew, Mark and Luke were all moved by the Holy Ghost to record the history of the rich man who came to Christ. This fact should be noticed. It shows us that there are lessons before us which demand special attention. When God would impress on Peter his duty towards the Gentiles, He sent him a vision which was repeated "three times." (Acts 10:16+.)

Someone came ([proserchomai](#)) **to Him** - Mark gives us more detail writing that **As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him.**" (Mt 10:17+) One might ask what is he asking? As **Bock** says this is "Jewish way to asked about being saved by gaining life in the world to come."

And said, "**Teacher** ([didaskalos](#)), **what good thing** ([agathos](#)) **shall I do** ([poieo](#)) **that I may obtain eternal** ([aionios](#)) **life** ([zoe](#))" - Both Mk 10:17+ and Lu 18:18+ call Jesus "**good** ([agathos](#)) **Teacher**" a very unusual way to address a teacher. One could paraphrase Matthew's version as "*What good work should I do to obtain eternal life?*" His question is that of every non-Christian religion, every cult, and every non-believer who refuses to enter eternal life by grace through faith in Jesus. **What shall I DO** is the death knell to **eternal life** with Christ. It is not **what shall I DO** but what has been DONE that I might enter inherit eternal life? It is not **what shall I DO**, but in Whom shall I believe? Jesus said it this way "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him Whom He has sent." (John 6:29) The only "good work" that "works" is belief in Jesus!

If we look at the positive side of this encounter, the young man came with the right attitude (contrast the lawyer's attitude in Luke 10:25+) and the right question (cf Philippian jailer - Acts 16:30+). On the negative side, **William Lane** says the form of his "question" ("What must I DO to inherit eternal life?") implies a piety of achievement which stands in contrast to Jesus' teaching that a man **must receive** ([dechomai](#) - welcome) the Kingdom (or life) as a gift from God in his helplessness (Mark 10:15, Lk 18:17+ = "like a little child"). In the light of (Lk 18:21), the man evidently thought that there were conditions to be fulfilled beyond those set forth in the

Law." (See [The Gospel of Mark - Page 365](#))

It is interesting to note that even the dictionary defines **DO** as to carry out or perform an action. **DO** is the crux of the young man's question. On the other hand the dictionary defines **RECEIVE** as to take something offered into one's hand or possession. His question should have been - "How can I **RECEIVE** eternal life?" Ephesians 2:8-9 says eternal life is not earned by received as a gift "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, **it is the gift of God**, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." Ro 3:24+ adds that one is "justified **as a gift** by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

There is one more point to observe regarding what is wrong regarding the young man's question '**what good thing shall I do**' - Perhaps we have had a rich relative pass away and they leave us an inheritance. Now what do we have to DO to inherit the inheritance? Nothing. A person does not do anything to inherit an [inheritance](#)! An inheritance is something that we receive as a [bequest](#) from someone else. Of course, since salvation is a gift, we still must receive it (by faith) (Jn 1:12+). Even an earthly inheritance will not be forced on the one to whom the inheritance has been [bequeathed](#). Jesus, the God-Man, died that we might inherit His eternal life and His perfect righteousness, but these gifts must be received by faith. Have you received this inheritance which God graciously makes available for all who will call upon His Name (cf Ro 10:13+)?

The heart of the lesson is that the sinner must be led to understand the cost required to receive eternal life.

-- John MacArthur

Sean O'Donnell suggests that this man's "question, despite its obvious flaws, displays his fear of God, his recognition of Jesus' authority, his genuine concern for his own soul, and his belief in life after death-the "attainment of the resurrected state. I think if most of us were honest we would admit that we think very little about life after death. It is simply not our everyday preoccupation. It is not what makes us restless. It is not what worries us. Our biggest concerns usually revolve around missing out on the benefits of this life. Most of the so-called important questions we ask have something or other to do with the here and now. They are earthbound questions. But this man appears to be genuinely concerned about life after death, not simply and superficially about this life. So this man's question, though he himself will prove to be full of love for the present world, is the right question in that it asks "the essential question."" (See [Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth - Page 546](#))

ETERNAL LIFE

In his commentary on Matthew, **John MacArthur** explains that "Although **eternal life** obviously carries the idea of being an everlasting reality it does not refer simply to unending existence (**Ed**: Although of course that is also wonderfully true). Even ancient pagans knew that mere unending existence would not necessarily be desirable. According to Greek mythology, Aurora, goddess of the dawn, fell in love with a young mortal named Tithonus. When Zeus offered to provide anything she wished for her human lover, she asked that he might never die. The wish was granted, but because she had not asked that Tithonus remain forever young, he continued to grow older and more decrepit. Instead of being blessed, he was cursed to perpetual degeneration. If, as William Hendriksen insightfully observes, "'life' means active response to one's environment," then eternal life must mean active response to that which is eternal, namely God's heavenly realm. Just as physical life is the ability to live and move and respond in the physical world, eternal life is the ability to live and move and respond in the heavenly world. Eternal life is first of all a quality of existence, the divinely-endowed ability to be alive to God and the things of God. The Jews saw it as that which fills the heart with hope of life after death. The unsaved person is spiritually alive only to sin (**Ed**: That's a mind boggling thought!). But when he receives Christ as Lord and Savior, he becomes alive to God and to righteousness (Ro 6:1-10, 11-13). That is the essence of eternal life, the life of God's own Son dwelling within." (See [Matthew Commentary](#))

Eternal life always refers primarily to a QUALITY of life and not so much a QUANTITY of life.

While this may sound simplistic or self-evident, the very fact that the rich young ruler sought **eternal life** indicates that he recognized he had a need for **eternal life**. Something was missing in his life. In the world's eyes, he had it all, but in God's eyes he didn't have anything of eternal value. He is like so many in Europe, Japan and America who are relatively wealthy and so feel no need for eternal life. After all "*Life is Good*" is the mantra of our day -- look at the bumper stickers, social media posts, advertisements, etc. The tragedy is the lost world thinks that life is good because they have "things," but the truth is their life is tragically empty. They know they are not alive to God but could care less. But God in His grace and mercy has set eternity in the hearts of all men (Eccl 3:11), but most pridefully refuse to follow this divinely implanted instinct. As Daniel Estes put it "humans are bound by time, but they are wired for eternity. They intuitively know that there must be meaning somewhere, and that they were made for more than vain toil." The rich young ruler was willing to acknowledge that he was made for something more than "chasing after the wind." And so he seems to be off to such a promising start.

Matthew Henry Concise - Mt 19:16-22. Christ knew that covetousness was the sin which most easily beset this young man; though he had got honestly what he possessed, yet he could not cheerfully part with it, and by this his want of sincerity was shown. Christ's promises make his precepts easy, and his yoke pleasant and very comfortable; yet this promise was as much a trial of the young man's faith, as the precept was of his charity and contempt of the world. It is required of us in following Christ, that we duly attend his ordinances, strictly follow his pattern, and cheerfully submit to his disposals; and this from love to him, and in dependence on him. To sell all, and give to the poor, will not serve, but we are to follow Christ. The gospel is the only remedy for lost sinners. Many abstain from gross vices who do not attend to their obligations to God. Thousands of instances of disobedience in thought, word, and deed, are marked against them in the book of God. Thus numbers forsake Christ, loving this present world: they feel convictions and desires, but they depart sorrowful, perhaps trembling. It behoves us to try ourselves in these matters, for the Lord will try us.

Eternal (166)([aionios](#) from [aion](#)) means existing at all times, perpetual, pertaining to an unlimited duration of time (Ro 1:20 - God's power, Mt 18:8 - God's place of judgment, Ro 16:26 - God's attribute). [Aionios](#) (eternal) is the exact antithesis of [proskairos](#) (temporal). [Gotquestions](#) comments that [aionios](#) "carries the idea of *quality* as well as *quantity*". In fact, eternal life is not really associated with "years" at all, as it is independent of time. Eternal life can function outside of and beyond time, as well as within time." Ponder that thought beloved!

Life (2222)([zoe](#)) in Scripture is used to refer to **physical life** (Ro 8:38+ [Php 1:20+](#), etc) but more often to to **supernatural life** in contrast to a life subject to eternal death (Jn 3:36+). **Zoe** speaks of a quality of life of fullness which alone belongs to God the Giver of life and is available to His children now (Ro 6:4+ [Ep 4:18+](#)) as well as in eternity future ([Mk 10:30+](#), [Titus 1:2+](#)). Uses of **Zoe** in Mark - Mk. 9:43; Mk. 9:45; Mk. 10:17; Mk. 10:30. The ethical and spiritual qualities of this **life** which God is, are communicated to the sinner when the latter places his faith in the Lord Jesus as Saviour, and this becomes the new, animating, energizing, motivating principle which transforms the experience of that individual, and the saint thus lives a Christian **life**. **Eternal life** in Mark - Mark 10:17, Mark 10:30

Richards writes that "Zoe in classical Greek refers to natural life--the principle that enables living things to move and to grow. In the NT, zoe focuses on the theological meaning rather than on the biological. From the perspective of the NT, in every respect life is the counterpart of death. Each book of the NT speaks of zoe. In each, the principle of life lifts our vision beyond our earthly existence to reveal a unique quality of life that spans time and eternity and that has its roots in God. It is the biblical use and meaning of zoe that most concerns us as we examine what the NT says about life. ([Richards, L O: Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Regency](#))

Eternal life always refers primarily to a QUALITY of life and not so much a QUANTITY of life. The phrase is not found in the Old Testament although the equivalent "everlasting life" is found in Daniel 12:2+ (which is an excellent verse to substantiate the tragic truth that spiritual death like spiritual life is everlasting, as the same Hebrew verb [olam](#) modifies both conditions.

THOUGHT - [Eternal punishment](#) is forever beloved [cf Mt 25:46+]. Dear fellow believer, we must believe that truth, not to shock others so much as to shock ourselves into this absolute reality, one that the Spirit of God will/can use to motivate us deeply to boldly share the Gospel (cf Acts 4:31+) with those who are only one heartbeat away from everlasting punishment! May our Father stir our hearts with this truth and grant us the gift of Spirit enabled boldness and spiritual vision to recognize the opportunities (Col 4:5-6+) He gives us to share the Gospel with those who will be otherwise forever lost. Amen.

When was the last time you really pondered the concept that you are living in eternity NOW and that what you do for Jesus in the temporal NOW will impact your FOREVER in eternity?

THOUGHT - Another side thought is that **eternal life** for believers is NOW. Too many believers are living their lives for the **temporal** rather than the **eternal**, in part because they do not fully grasp that they are living in "eternity" today, right NOW. If we come to fully grasp all that "the hope of eternal life (Titus 1:2), this reality has the potential to radically transform our approach to our temporal existence. It is the difference between what I like to call "**vertical vision**" (eternal perspective) versus "**horizontal vision**" (temporal perspective). If you are living for eternity (*vertically* so to speak), it will affect every decision you make in time (*horizontally*, so to speak). See discussion of "Vertical Vision."

Kenneth Wuest (in comments on 2Pe 1:3) writes that **zoe** "speaks of life in the sense of one who is possessed of vitality and animation. It is used of the absolute fullness of life, both essential and ethical, which belongs to God. It is used to designate the life which God gives to the believing sinner, a vital, animating, spiritual, ethical dynamic which transforms his inner being and as a result, his behavior. (In comments on 1John 1:2 Wuest adds that the) life that God is, is not to be defined as merely animation, but as definitely

ethical in its content. God is not the mere reason for the universe, as the Greeks thought, but a Person with the characteristics and qualities of a divine Person. The ethical and spiritual qualities of this life which God is, are communicated to the sinner when the latter places his faith in the Lord Jesus as Saviour, and this becomes the new, animating, energizing, motivating principle which transforms the experience of that individual, and the saint thus lives a Christian life. The message of (the epistle of) John is that since the believer is a partaker of this life, it is an absolute necessity that he show the ethical and spiritual qualities that are part of the essential nature of God, in his own life. If these are entirely absent, John says, that person is devoid of the life of God, and is unsaved. The ethical and spiritual qualities of this life were exhibited to the human race in the earthly life of the Lord Jesus. His life thus becomes the pattern of what our lives should be in holiness, self-sacrifice, humility and love. ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used by permission)

C H Spurgeon - "Good Master." —Matthew 19:16 Morning and Evening

If the young man in the gospel used this title in speaking to our Lord, how much more fitly may I thus address him! He is indeed my Master in both senses, a ruling Master and a teaching Master. I delight to run upon his errands, and to sit at his feet. I am both his servant and his disciple, and count it my highest honour to own the double character. If he should ask me why I call him "good," I should have a ready answer. It is true that "there is none good but one, that is, God," but then he is God, and all the goodness of Deity shines forth in him. In my experience, I have found him good, so good, indeed, that all the good I have has come to me through him. He was good to me when I was dead in sin, for he raised me by his Spirit's power; he has been good to me in all my needs, trials, struggles, and sorrows. Never could there be a better Master, for his service is freedom, his rule is love: I wish I were one thousandth part as good a servant. When he teaches me as my Rabbi, he is unspeakably good, his doctrine is divine, his manner is condescending, his spirit is gentleness itself. No error mingles with his instruction—pure is the golden truth which he brings forth, and all his teachings lead to goodness, sanctifying as well as edifying the disciple. Angels find him a good Master and delight to pay their homage at his footstool. The ancient saints proved him to be a good Master, and each of them rejoiced to sing, "I am thy servant, O Lord!" My own humble testimony must certainly be to the same effect. I will bear this witness before my friends and neighbours, for possibly they may be led by my testimony to seek my Lord Jesus as their Master. O that they would do so! They would never repent so wise a deed. If they would but take his easy yoke, they would find themselves in so royal a service that they would enlist in it for ever.

Gleason Archer - How can we resolve the discrepancies in Synoptic accounts of the rich-young-ruler episode?- See [New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties page 333](#).

The three reports of the encounter between Christ and the rich young ruler are found in Matthew 19:16–30, Mark 10:17–31, and Luke 18:18–30. These contain special details, some of which are found only in one of the three accounts, others in only two out of the three. But when we synthesize the information contributed by all three Synoptics, we obtain a fuller picture of all that transpired than would be the case with any single account. Therefore we may be grateful for their occasional diversity.

Stonehouse (Borrow [Synoptic Gospels. pp. 95–96](#)) furnished the following statistics.

The Marcan account is considerably longer than the others, employing 279 Greek words, as against Matthew with 270 (of which 38 occupy the unique 19:28) and Luke with only 202. This ratio is of unusual interest inasmuch as most New Testament scholars regard Mark as the earliest of the four Evangelists. If so, his longer and fuller account cannot be regarded as a "later" embellishment of a more primitive "tradition"- as liberal critics usually assume when one synoptic account is longer than the others.

Stonehouse devotes much discussion to the interesting question of the principles followed by each of the Synoptists in selecting his material. Quite obviously Matthew's special interest included demonstrating to Jews

- (1) that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, i.e., the authentic Jewish Messiah;
- (2) that Jesus was the divine Prophet and finally authoritative Teacher of the holy life (brought together in five major blocks of connected instruction); and
- (3) that Jesus fulfilled the promises to Israel and yet was also the Light of the Gentiles—to whom the kingdom of God would be transferred.

As for Mark, his focus is on Christ's redemptive deeds even more than on His oral teaching; the emphasis is on action more than discussion. Hence the characteristic word is "straight-way." His concern is to interpret Palestinian customs (with occasional quotations in Aramaic) to a Gentile public—probably Roman, in view of his many Latinisms.

Luke, on the other hand, stressed the personal dynamic of the Lord Jesus and His tender concern for individual people, including

women and children. But his guiding principle is to follow a consistently historical methodology and to cover the whole sweep of Jesus' biography from the very beginning (even to the birth of the forerunner, John the Baptist; the annunciation to Mary and the shepherds; and the visit to the temple at age twelve) to the very end (the Ascension from the Mount of Olives). He includes an extraordinary number of episodes and heart-searching parables not included by the other two. The Perfect Man, incarnating the love and grace of God, opens up the way to a new life for all true believers, whether Jew or Gentile.

It is a profitable exercise to correlate the insertions as well as the omissions that mark each synoptist in his treatment of the episodes in Christ's career from the vantage point of these three areas of interest. All three are to be regarded as trustworthy, helpful witnesses, even though they emphasize slightly different facets of Christ's life and personality. But it is when we have the benefit of all three reports that we can assemble the fullest understanding of each of Jesus' encounters with people and His responses to their needs.

As we compare the testimonies of Matthew, Mark and Luke, we will bring out the particular contributions from each as we combine them all into a full composite.

The Query of the Rich Young Ruler

As he makes his first approach to Jesus on the matter of his own standing before God as a justified believer, the ruler asks,

"Good [Mark, Luke] Master, what good [Matt.] thing shall I do, that I may obtain [Matt.] or: inherit [Mark, Luke] eternal life?"

Jesus answers him with a question, to probe his understanding of the divine nature of Christ's goodness and of the nature of goodness itself.

"Why do you call Me good [Mark, Luke], or: ask Me about what is good [Matt.]? There is just one who is good [Matt.]; in fact, there is no one good but God alone [Mark, Luke]. But if you wish to enter into life [Matt.], you know the commandments [Mark, Luke]; keep them [Matt.]."

Christ's Challenge to the Ruler's Sincerity

The young man countered with a request for specifics:

"Which of them [Matt.]?" he enquired.

Jesus pointed him to the most basic of all—the Decalogue.

"Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother. And also [Matt.] you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The young man [Matt.] said to Him,

"All these I have kept, from [Mark, Luke] my youth up. What [Matt.] do I still lack? And Jesus looked [Luke] on him loved him, and said, "You do lack one thing [Mark, Luke]; if you wish to be perfect [Matt.], go [Matt., Mark] and sell all the possessions [Matt.] you have, and give them out to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. And come and follow Me."

The Young Man's Refusal and Departure

When he heard this statement, the young ruler became downcast [Luke] and very grieved [Matt., Luke] as he went away—for he had many possessions [Matt., Mark] and was very rich [Luke]. On observing this, Jesus looked around [Mark] on His disciples and said to them, "I tell you truly [Matt.] that it is with difficulty that a rich man will enter the kingdom of heaven [Matt.]. In fact, those who possess wealth will enter God's kingdom only with difficulty [Mark, Luke]." But the disciples were amazed [Mark] at His words. Again He said, "Children, how hard it is to enter into the kingdom of God [Mark]! It is easier for a camel to go into [Matt., Luke] and pass through [Mark] the eye of a needle than to enter the kingdom of God [so, even Matt.]."

The Rewards of Dedicated Discipleship

The disciples were astonished [Matt., Mark] at hearing this; and they said [Mark] to one another, "Who then can be saved?" And looking on them [Matt., Mark] Jesus said, "With men this is impossible, but all things [Matt., Mark] are possible with God."

Then answering [Matt.] Peter began [Mark] to say to Him, "Behold, we have left all [Matt., Mark] that is ours [Luke] and have followed You [Matt.]. What then shall there be for us?" Jesus said to them [Matt., Luke], "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed [Matt.] Me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you yourselves also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel [Matt. only]" (Note that on another occasion, in Luke 22:30b, Christ repeats that same promise about sitting on the twelve thrones.)

Then Jesus continued with a promise for this present world: “there is no one who has left [Mark, Luke—but Matt. phrases it: ‘And everyone who has left’] home [Matt.: ‘homes’] or wife [Luke] or brothers or sisters, or father or mother [Matt., Mark] [Luke: ‘or parents’], or children or lands, for the sake of My name [Matt.] and the gospel [Mark] and the kingdom of God [Luke], who will not receive many times as much [Matt., Luke; Mark: ‘a hundred times as much’] at this present time [Mark, Luke], homes and brothers and sisters and children and lands [Mark only], along with persecutions; and in the age to come [Mark, Luke] he will inherit [Matt.] eternal life. But many who are first [Matt., Mark; Luke: ‘And behold, there are last who shall be first’] shall be last, and those who are last shall be first [Matt., Mark; Luke: ‘and there are first who shall be last’].

As we conclude this synthesis of the three synoptic accounts, we note that there are three verbal variations that convey exactly the same thought but that are technically different in wording:

- (1) Matthew 19:29: “And everyone who has left,” as opposed to Mark 10:29 and Luke 18:29, which read “There is no one who has left”;
- (2) Mark 10:30 reads “a hundred times,” as opposed to Matthew 19:29 and Luke 18:30, which read “many times as much”;
- (3) Luke 18:29 reads “parents,” as opposed Matthew 19:29 and Mark 10:29, which read “father or mother.” Perhaps it should be mentioned also that Matthew 19:29 reads “homes”(oikias) while the other two read “home” (oikian).

This pericope, then, gives us an instructive example of the range of verbal variation present in the Synoptics, displaying a genuine overlap or alternative rather than related items that may be fitted together as a composite. Apart from possible scribal error (the Peshitta Syriac version of Luke 18:29 does not read a special word for “parents” but employs ’abohē, “fathers”; so it looks as if Luke had this word in mind he chose the Greek word goneis [“parents”] and preferred not to break it up into “father and mother,” as Matt. and Mark decided to do), items 1 and 2 leave us uncertain as to which exact Aramaic term our Lord used in His actual discourse as originally given. But we may be content with the observation that each case can be explained on the basis of the same original statement in Aramaic, which is susceptible of being handled in more than one way when it is cast into Greek (as in the case of “parents” vs. “father and mother” in item 3). In the latter case, perhaps it should be added that to this day is still customary in literary Arabic to use the dual number (’abawāni) of the word for “father” (’abun) in order to express the idea of “parents.” Thus “his parents” would in Arabic be ’abawāhu (lit., “his two fathers”

Norman Geisler - see [When Critics Ask](#) - MATTHEW 19:16–30 (cf. Mark 10:17–31; Luke 18:18–30)—If Jesus was God, why did He seem to rebuke the rich young ruler for calling Him good?

PROBLEM: The rich young ruler called Jesus “Good Teacher,” and Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.” Yet on other occasions Jesus not only claimed to be God (Mark 2:8–10; John 8:58; 10:30), but He accepted the claim of others that He was God (John 20:28–29). Why did Jesus appear to deny that He was God to the young ruler?

SOLUTION: Jesus did not deny He was God to the young ruler. He simply asked him to examine the implications of what he was saying. In effect, Jesus was saying to him, “Do you realize what you are saying when you call Me Good? Are you saying I am God?”

The young man did not realize the implications of what he was saying. Thus Jesus was forcing him to a very uncomfortable dilemma. Either Jesus was good and God, or else He was bad and man. A good God or a bad man, but not merely a good man. Those are the real alternatives with regard to Christ. For no good man would claim to be God when he was not. The liberal Christ, who was only a good moral teacher but not God, is a figment of human imagination.

Norman Geisler - See [When Cultists Ask](#) - MATTHEW 19:16–30 (cf. Mark 10:17–31; Luke 18:18–30)—If Jesus was God, why did he seem to rebuke the rich young ruler for calling him good?

MISINTERPRETATION: The rich young ruler called Jesus “Good Teacher,” and Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.” Was Jesus denying that he was God to the young ruler? Jehovah’s Witnesses think so. “Jesus was saying that no one is as good as God is, not even Jesus himself. God is good in a way that separates him from Jesus” (Should You Believe in the Trinity? 1989, 17).

CORRECTING THE MISINTERPRETATION: Jesus did not deny he was God to the young ruler. He simply asked him to examine the implications of what he was saying. In effect, Jesus was saying to him, “Do you realize what you are saying when you call me good? Do you realize that this is something you should attribute only to God? Are you saying I am God?”

The young man did not realize the implications of what he was saying. Thus Jesus was forcing him to a very uncomfortable

dilemma. Either Jesus was good and God, or else he was bad and man. A good God or a bad man, but not merely a good man. Those are the real alternatives with regard to Christ. For no good man would claim to be God when he was not.

Matthew 19:17 And He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

- **There is only One:** 1Sa 2:2 Ps 52:1 Ps 145:7-9 Jas 1:17 1Jn 4:8-10,16
- **but if you wish:** Lev 18:5 Eze 20:11,12 Lu 10:26-28 Ro 10:5 Ga 3:11-13

Related Passages:

Psalms 145:9 The LORD is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works.

ONLY ONE WHO IS TRULY GOOD

And He said to him, “Why are you asking ([erotao](#)) Me about what is good ([agathos](#))?” - The question **what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life** sounds good...BUT Jesus doesn't answer him right away — He questions the question! Jesus challenges the young man's understanding of goodness. The man wants a checklist. Jesus wants his heart.

Jesus is saying: “If you're calling Me good, are you recognizing who I truly am?” It is a gentle invitation to ask if this man was treating Jesus as a good moral teacher, or did he see Him as the divine Son of God? Jesus isn't denying that He is good — He's confronting the superficial flattery and pressing the man to consider God as the true standard of goodness.

There is only One who is good ([agathos](#)) This states a foundational theological truth only God is truly and perfectly good in nature. Jesus is making the point that human efforts alone cannot meet God's standard of goodness. The young ruler assumes he can do something **good** enough to earn life, but Jesus points to a higher standard — only God is truly **good**.

but if you wish ([thelo](#)) to enter into life ([zoe](#)), keep ([tereo](#) [aorist imperative](#)) the commandments ([entole](#)) - Jesus begins His reply with what the man thinks he understands, which is keeping the Law. Jesus does not say this because He believes keeping commandments earns salvation, but because He seeks to reveal the man's heart. As the conversation unfolds we see that Jesus is leading him to realize that entering life requires more than outward obedience — it demands surrender.

David Jeremiah - ARE YOU GOOD? MATTHEW 19:17 [Sanctuary: Finding Moments of Refuge in the Presence of God](#)

A person who is a good person is an individual of lofty ideals, noble purposes, strong character, reliable conduct and trustworthy integrity. The only one who truly embodies all of those characteristics is Jesus Christ.

We come to understand the word goodness as we see it alongside the word righteousness. Someone has said that justice is what God gives to us that we deserve. Goodness goes beyond that and is that which God gives us beyond what we deserve.

The great characteristic of goodness as it is found in relationship with righteousness is generosity. It is what a person gets that isn't deserved. It is what God gives to a person that could never be earned. Goodness in its relationship to righteousness teaches us about generosity.

You don't have to be rich to be generous. But what do you do with what you have? We need to take a good long look at our lives and ask God how our attitudes have been to the needs around us. If we've been protective and closefisted, we need to say, “God, by the grace You will give me, I will change.” Begin to bear fruit in your life, the fruit of a generous spirit.

QUESTION [Why did Jesus tell the rich young ruler he could be saved by obeying the commandments?](#)

ANSWER - To understand Jesus' response to the rich young ruler's question—“What must I do to be saved?”—we must consider three things: the background of the rich young ruler, the purpose of his question, and the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The young man had asked Jesus, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” (Matthew 19:16). Jesus responded, “If you want to enter life, keep the commandments” (verse 17). At first glance, it appears that Jesus is saying that the young man and, by extension, all people must obey the commandments in order to be saved. But is that really what He was saying? Since the essence of the salvation message is that we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8–9), why would Jesus offer the rich young ruler an “alternative plan”?

The story of the rich young ruler is found in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew 19:16–23, Mark 10:17–22, and Luke 18:18–23. The man is described as a “ruler,” which means he was a prince or magistrate of some sort. Since no Roman ruler would address Jesus as “teacher” or “master,” it is assumed that this man was a Jewish ruler in the local synagogue. This man also had “great wealth” (Matthew 19:22), and Jesus later used His conversation with this man to teach the detrimental effect money can have on one’s desire for eternal life (verses 23–24). The lesson Jesus draws from this incident concerns money, not salvation by works.

The first thing Jesus says to the man’s greeting, “Good teacher,” is to remind him that no one is good except God (Matthew 19:17). Jesus was not denying His own divinity. Rather, Jesus was immediately getting the man to think about what “good” really means—since only God is good, then what we normally call human goodness might be something else entirely. This truth comes into play later in the conversation. When the man asked Jesus to specify which commandments he should keep, Jesus recited six of the commandments, including “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 19:19). The man replies, “All these I have kept. . . . What do I still lack?” (verse 20), and that is a key statement. The young man was obviously religious and sincere in his pursuit of righteousness. His problem was that he considered himself to be faultless concerning the Law. And this is the point that Jesus challenges.

Jesus tells the man, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Matthew 19:21). The young man decided that Jesus was asking too much. “He went away sad, because he had great wealth” (verse 22). Rather than obey Jesus’ instructions, he turned his back on the Lord and walked away. The man’s choice undoubtedly saddened Jesus as well, because Jesus loved him (Mark 10:21).

In telling the young man to keep the commandments, Jesus was not saying that he could be saved by obeying the commandments; rather, Jesus was emphasizing the Law as God’s perfect standard. *If* you can keep the Law perfectly, then you can escape sin’s penalty—but that’s a big *if*. When the man responded that he met the Law’s standard, Jesus simply touched on one issue that proved the man did not measure up to God’s holiness. The man was not willing to follow the Lord, if that meant he must give up his wealth. Thus, the man was breaking the two [greatest commands](#); he did not love the Lord with all his heart, and he did not love his neighbor as himself. He loved himself (and his money) more. Far from keeping “all” the commandments, as he had claimed, the man was a sinner like everyone else. The Law proved it.

If the man had loved God and other people more than he did his property, he would have been willing to give up his wealth to the service of God and man. But that was not the case. He had made an idol of his wealth, and he loved it more than God. With surgical precision, Jesus exposes the greed in the man’s heart—greed the man did not even suspect he had. Jesus’ statement that only God is good (Matthew 19:17) is proved in the young man’s response to Jesus’ command.

In His conversation with the rich young ruler, Christ did not teach that we are saved by the works of the Law. The Bible’s message is that salvation is by [grace](#) through faith (Romans 3:20, 28; 4:6; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:9; 2 Timothy 1:9). Rather, Jesus used the man’s love of money to show how the man fell short of God’s holy standard—as do we all. The rich young ruler needed the Savior, and so do we.

Matthew 19:18 Then he *said to Him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS;

- **Which:** Ga 3:10 Jas 2:10,11
- **YOU SHALL NOT :** Mt 5:21-28 Ex 20:12-17 De 5:16-21 Mk 10:19 Lu 18:20 Ro 13:8-10

Related Passages:

Luke 18:20+ “You know the commandments, ‘DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.’”

Exodus 20:12-16+ “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. 13 “You shall not murder. 14 “You shall not commit adultery. 15 “You shall not steal. 16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Deuteronomy 5:16-20+ ‘Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you. 17 “You shall not murder. 18 “You shall not commit adultery. 19 “You shall not steal. 20 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Deuteronomy 24:14+ “You shall not **oppress** (Hebrew - ashaq - defraud, extort) a hired servant who is poor

and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns.

GIVE ME A LIST JESUS

Then he *said to Him, “Which ones?” (or “What kind?”) - The young man's question at first glance seems innocent, even eager! After all, there were hundreds of commandments in the Torah (613, traditionally), so his question might be a way of narrowing down which ones Jesus considered most important. It's as if he is asking “What's the minimum required of me to get into heaven? Give me the checklist so I can be good enough.” As do all the non-Christian religions, this young man is emphasizing rule-keeping over relationship, duty over devotion, doing over being. When he asks “**Which ones?**”, he unknowingly reveals that he's looking for boundaries, not transformation. He wants to do enough — but not give all.

In other words, he might be hoping Jesus will give him a short, doable list — something he can check off, which reveals his performance-based mindset: “Tell me the rules I need to follow, and I'll follow them.” Recall that his original question was “What must I do?” Now, he asks “Which ones?”, staying in that same task-oriented frame — as if eternal life can be earned by ticking off commandments. His question also clearly implies that he does not grasp the deeper issue, that the heart of his problem is his heart! In other words by asking “**Which ones?**” he is showing that he is thinking externally (actions, works), while Jesus will now take aim at the real issue, which is internal, the allegiance of his heart.

THOUGHT - Let's all take a look in the mirror now. Aren't we all (at least at times) a little like this young man? We come to Jesus and ask “Lord, what do I have to do?” But Jesus says “It's not about **doing** but **being**.” Jesus is always probing deeper asking “Will you let Me **BE** your treasure, your All in All?” Can you/I sincerely, with a whole heart, sing the song [You are My All in All, the Treasure that I Seek](#)? Jesus does not want part of our heart. He wants our whole heart (Mk 12:30-31+, Dt 6:5+, Pr 3:5+, Jer 29:13, Ps 86:11-12+, Mt 6:24+)! Following Jesus is not about which commandments we keep, but about who commands our life, who is on the throne of our heart? Are you as convicted as I am?! Oh great Father, when we are honest, we confess that our sinful soul so often cleaves to the dust, and so we plead with You to revive us by Your Spirit according to Your Word, for Your Lamb, Who Alone is Worthy of wholehearted devotion. Amen. (cf Ps 119:25+)

And Jesus ([lesous](#)) said, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER ([phroneuo](#)); YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY ([moicheuo](#)); YOU SHALL NOT STEAL ([klepto](#)); YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS ([pseudomartureo](#)) Jesus bypasses the first four commandments and essentially quotes from the last section (Ex 20:12–16+; Dt 5:16–20+, except do not defraud, an allusion to Dt 24:14+) which have more to do with man to man relationships. He does not list them in order for honor your father is #5 is actually listed last, preceded by murder #6, adultery #7, stealing #8, false witness #9.

Matthew 19:19 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”

- **Honour:** Mt 15:4-6 Lev 19:3 Pr 30:17 Eph 6:1,2
- **Thou:** Mt 22:39 Lev 19:18 Lu 10:27 Ro 13:9 Ga 5:14 Jas 2:8

Related Passages:

Exodus 20:12-16+ “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. 13 “You shall not murder. 14 “You shall not commit adultery. 15 “You shall not steal. 16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Deuteronomy 5:16-20+ ‘Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you. 17 ‘You shall not murder. 18 ‘You shall not commit adultery. 19 ‘You shall not steal. 20 ‘You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

HONOR ([timao](#) in [present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) **YOUR FATHER** ([pater](#)) **AND MOTHER;**

and YOU SHALL LOVE ([agapao](#)) **YOUR NEIGHBOR** ([plesion](#)) **AS YOURSELF** - This verse teaches we do not have any problem with “self-esteem!” We love ourselves! Ugh!

Remember that man's good requires that you should be kind to your fellow creatures. The best way for you to make the world better is to be kind yourself. Are you a preacher? Preach in a surly way, and in a surly tone to your church; a pretty church you will make of it before long! Are you a Sunday-school teacher? Teach your children with a frown on your face; a fine lot they will learn! Are you a master? Do you hold family prayer? Get in a passion with your servants, and say, "Let us pray." A vast amount of devotion you will develop in such a manner as that. Are you a warder of a gaol, and have prisoners under you? Abuse them and ill-treat them, and then send the chaplain to them. A fine preparation for the reception of the word of God! You have poor around you; you wish to see them elevated, you say. You are always grumbling about the poverty of their dwellings, and the meanness of their tastes. Go and make a great stir at them all—a fine way that would be to improve them! Now, just wash your face of that black frown, and buy a little of the essence of summer somewhere, and put it on your face; and have a smile on your lip, and say, "I love you. I am no cant, but I love you, and as far as I can I will prove my love to you. What can I do for you? Can I help you over a stile? Can I give you any assistance, or speak a kind word to you? Perhaps I could look after your little daughter. Can I fetch the doctor to your wife now she is ill?" All these kind things would be making the world a little better.

Matthew 19:20 The young man *said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?"

KJV Matthew 19:20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

BGT Matthew 19:20 λ γει α τ νεαν σκος· π ντα τα τα φ λαξα· τ τι στερ ;

NET Matthew 19:20 The young man said to him, "I have wholeheartedly obeyed all these laws. What do I still lack?"

CSB Matthew 19:20 "I have kept all these," the young man told Him. "What do I still lack?"

ESV Matthew 19:20 The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?"

NIV Matthew 19:20 "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

NLT Matthew 19:20 "I've obeyed all these commandments," the young man replied. "What else must I do?"

- **All:** Mk 10:20-21 Lu 15:7,29 18:11,12,21 Jn 8:7 Ro 3:19-23 7:9 Ga 3:24 Php 3:6
- **what:** Mk 10:20-21 Lu 18:21-22

Related Passages:

Mark 10:20-21 And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." 21 Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Luke 18:21-22 And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." 22 When Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.

THE FALSE CONFIDENCE OF THE YOUNG MAN

The young man *said to Him, "All these things I have kept ([phulasso](#)); what am I still lacking ([hustereo](#)) - He's been a religious rule keeper since he was young. **Kept** ([phulasso](#)) means to watch or guard much like a military guard or sentry keeps watch over his post (Acts 23:35, 28:16) which gives us a good sense of this young man's mindset regarding the commandments. From his youth (detail from Mk 10:20) he had been like a [sentry](#) at his post watching to make sure he did not let one of the commandments escape his attention!

He was undoubtedly being sincere when he stated he had obeyed all the laws. He had fallen into the deceptive, deadly trap of works based salvation (which is NOT salvation) and had confined his righteousness to external obedience. Jesus always goes for the heart of the matter which is the problem of men's heart and in this case He will disclose the rich man's heart in the following passages by his response to Jesus' command to give away all he had. His failure to capitulate to these requirements (not to save him, but to show him that he was not ready to truly be saved) revealed that he loved money more than God. In short his possessions were his "functional" idol and possessed his heart! And as Jesus said in Matthew 6:24+ "No one can serve two masters (HERE - MONEY OR

GOD); for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth (IF WEALTH IS NOT YOUR IDOL THEN FILL IN THE _____)."

What am I still lacking (hustereo)? - NLT - "What else must I do?" His question tells us that he knew something was missing. He knew that despite his good behavior, his heart was restless. Deep down, he was asking "I've kept the rules — but why do I still feel empty? Is there more to eternal life than obedience?" And he was right.

NET NOTE - Greek "kept." The implication of this verb is that the man has obeyed the commandments without fail, so the adverb "wholeheartedly" has been added to the translation to bring out this nuance. While the rich man was probably being sincere when he insisted I have wholeheartedly obeyed all these laws, he had confined his righteousness to external obedience (ED: IN OTHER WORDS "HE WAS SINCERELY WRONG!"). The rich man's response to Jesus' command—to give away all he had—revealed that internally he loved money more than God.

Matthew 19:21 Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

KJV Matthew 19:21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

BGT Matthew 19:21 φη α τ η σο ς ε θ λεις τ λειος ε ναι, πα γε π λη σ ν σου τ π ρχοντα κα δ ς [το ς] πτωχο ς, κα ξεις θησαυ ς ν ο ρανο ς, κα δε ρο κολο θει μοι.

NET Matthew 19:21 Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

CSB Matthew 19:21 "If you want to be perfect," Jesus said to him, "go, sell your belongings and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me."

ESV Matthew 19:21 Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

NIV Matthew 19:21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

NLT Matthew 19:21 Jesus told him, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

NRS Matthew 19:21 Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

- **If:** Mt 5:19,20,48 Ge 6:9 17:1 Job 1:1 Ps 37:37 Lu 6:40 Php 3:12-15
- **go and sell:** Mt 6:19,20 Mk 10:21 Lu 12:33 14:33 16:9 18:22 Ac 2:45 4:32-35 1Ti 6:17-19 Heb 10:34
- **Come follow Me:** Mt 19:28 4:19 8:22 9:9 16:24 Mk 2:14 8:34 10:21 Lu 5:27 9:23 18:22 Jn 10:27 12:26

SELL ALL, FOLLOW ME AND HAVE ETERNAL TREASURE!

Jesus replies to the young man's question by giving not one commandment to keep, but essentially FIVE commandments to obey!

Jesus (lesous) said to him, "If (conditional clause) **you wish (thelo) to be complete (teleios** - perfect), (conditions that must be kept), **go (hupago present imperative** see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) and **sell (poleo aorist imperative** see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) **your possessions (huparcho) and give (aorist imperative** see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) **to the poor (ptochos), and you will have treasure (thesauros) in heaven (ouranos); and come (deuro), follow (akoloutho) Me** The young man had *everything* — status, wealth, morality, and spiritual curiosity. He asked Jesus a serious question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He even claimed he had kept all the commandments. But Jesus saw what the man couldn't: There was still one thing he lacked — a surrendered heart. Jesus doesn't give him a new rule. He gives him an invitation "**Come follow Me.**" Of course the only way the young man could obey Jesus' call was by yielding to the Holy Spirit to enable him to wholly surrender to Jesus.

THOUGHT - Dear reader do you wish to be rich? Do you want riches that will endure throughout eternity? Then the prize is yours for the taking. Simply believe and receive Jesus as Lord and Savior and follow Him all

the rest of your days on earth. Throughout eternity you will never second guess or question your decision to follow Him! And remember that Jesus is not saying you and I cannot have possessions. He is simply saying never let your possessions possess you and take His place on the throne of your heart!

So while it looks like Jesus is talking about losing everything, what He is really talking about is finding everything, everything that really counts. He is talking about having **treasure in Heaven**. He is talking about possessing this **treasure FOREVER**! Luke used this same phrase earlier recording Jesus' promise

Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing **treasure in heaven**, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. 34 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Lk 12:33-34+)

And again Jesus spoke on acquiring **treasures in heaven** in His Sermon on the Mount...

Do not store up (present imperative with negative = stop doing this!) for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 "But **store up** (present imperative = Not a suggestion but a command to make this your life's goal, daily pursuing treasuring treasure in Heaven, a goal only possible as you rely on and are enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit - Php 2:13NLT+) for yourselves **treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your **treasure** is, there your heart will be also. (Mt 6:19-21+)

THOUGHT - Jesus' negative and positive commandments beg a searching question that only you can answer - Where is your treasure? Where is your heart? Here or there! Corollary - Show me your treasure and I will tell you who you truly worship!

Believer's Study Bible - Jesus does not teach that salvation is ever achieved by divesting oneself of all possessions, even for charitable purposes. However, this youthful inquirer had one concern that was far greater than his desire to have life eternal. His possessions occupied the position of primary devotion in his life. Until he could persuade himself to be willing to seek God regardless of the cost (cf. Mt 6:33), he could never discover eternal life. Therefore, Jesus suggested the selling of his possessions.

Guzik has an interesting comment - We may make two mistakes here. The one is to believe this applies to everyone, when Jesus never made this a general command to all who would follow Him, but especially to this one rich man whose riches were clearly an obstacle to his discipleship. Instead, many rich people can do more good in the world by continuing to make money and using those resources for the glory of God and the good of others. The second mistake is to believe this applies to no one, when there are clearly those today for whom the best thing they could do for themselves spiritually is to radically forsake the materialism that is ruining them. Francis of Assisi was a notable one who heard Jesus speak these words to him, and gave away all he had to follow Jesus. ([Luke 18 Commentary](#))

Leon Morris - There is an implied call to faith, for the man could not do what Jesus asked without trusting him wholeheartedly. The call to give everything away was more than simply a dramatic challenge: it showed that the man had not understood the commandments he professed to have kept. The first of them enjoins the worship of one God. But when he was faced with the choice he found that he could not serve God if it meant parting with his money. It was not really God that had first place in his heart. ([The Gospel According to St. Luke: An Introduction and Commentary](#) - borrow)

NET NOTE - The call for sacrifice comes with a promise of eternal reward: You will have treasure in heaven. Jesus' call is a test to see how responsive the man is to God's direction through him. Will he walk the path God's agent calls him to walk? For a rich person who got it right, see Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1–10.

Oswald Chambers on **sell all you possess** - There is a **general principle** here and a **particular reference**. We are always in danger of taking the particular reference for the general principle and evading the general principle. The **particular reference** here is to selling material goods. The rich young ruler had deliberately to be destitute, deliberately to distribute, deliberately to discern where his treasure was, and devote himself to Jesus Christ. The **principle** underlying it is that I must detach myself from everything I possess. Many of us suppress our sense of property, we don't starve it, we suppress it. Undress yourself morally before God of everything that might be a possession until you are a mere conscious human being, and then give God that. That is where the battle is fought—in the domain of the will before God, it is not fought in external things at all. Is He sovereign Lord or is He not? Am I more devoted to my notion of what Jesus Christ wants than to Himself? If so, I am likely to hear one of His hard sayings that will produce sorrow in me. What Jesus says is hard, it is only easy when it comes to those who really are His disciples. **Beware of allowing anything to soften a hard word of Jesus.** (God's Workmanship)

(See comments on 1 Tim. 6:17–18.) 1 TIMOTHY 6:17–18—Should wealth be avoided or retained?

PROBLEM: Jesus urged the rich young ruler to “sell what you have and give to the poor” (Matt. 19:21). The early disciples sold their possessions and laid the money at the apostles’ feet (Acts 4:34–35). And Paul warned that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). However, God blessed Abraham and Job with riches, and Paul does not instruct the rich to give away all they have, but to use and “richly enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17–18).

SOLUTION: It should be observed, first of all, that Jesus’ instruction to “sell what you have and give to the poor” (Matt. 19:21) was to a rich young man who had made money his god, not to those who have not. There is nothing wrong with possessing riches—there is something wrong with being possessed by riches.

Further, there is no indication that the early disciples in Acts were either urged to sell all, or that they actually did. The land sold (Acts 4:34–35) may have been extra property. It is noteworthy that it does not say they sold their homes (see discussion on Acts 2:44–45). Finally, Paul does not say that money is evil, but only that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Seeking riches for their own sake is wrong, but seeking to have something to share with others in need is not. Thus, while God “gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17), in the same breath He warns, “not ... to trust in uncertain riches.”

Matthew 19:22 But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

- **he went:** Mt 13:22 14:9 Jdg 18:23,24 Da 6:14-17 Mk 6:26 10:22 Lu 18:23 Jn 19:12-16
- **for:** Mt 6:24 16:26 Ps 17:14 Eze 33:31 Eph 5:5 Col 3:5

Related Passages:

Luke 18:23+ But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.

Mark 10:22+ But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.

Mark 4:7, 19+ “Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. (4:19) but the worries of the world, and **the deceitfulness of riches**, and the desires for other things enter in and **choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful**.

Walking Away from Jesus!
(James Tissot)

HE WALKED AWAY FROM TRUTH AND WAS GRIEVED

But when the young man ([neaniskos](#)) **heard** ([akouo](#)) **this statement** ([logos](#)), **he went away grieving** ([lupeo](#)); **for he was one who owned much property** ([ktema](#)) - Instead of coming to follow Jesus, sadly he went away from Jesus. Assuming he never repented and believed, he walked into eternity as a poor rich man.

Mark 10:22 says he was **saddened** (*stugnazo*), which pictures a deep gloom coming over his countenance. In other words his countenance fell at the true words of Jesus (cf Cain in Ge 4:6-7+) **Vincent** says “The word **saddened** paints forcibly the gloom which clouded his face.”

Wuest - His riches were indeed as thorns (Jerome) which threatened to choke the seed of the word (Mk 4:7, 19+), but the end of the struggle is not revealed. (Borrow [Mark in the Greek New Testament for the English reader - page 204](#))

Henry Morris - No matter how outwardly righteous a person may be, he can only be saved if he comes to Christ with nothing of his own. The Lord may not ask a follower to give up his possessions or anything else, but maybe He will. That person must at least be willing to do so. We cannot bargain with God. We are dead in sins until He saves us; only Christ can give us life.

NET NOTE - Grk “he had many possessions.” This term (κτμα, ktēma) is often used for land as a possession.

Ryrie - The man was being asked to prove his claim to have kept the commandments, especially the one that says “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 19:19, Lev 19:18). His unwillingness to do so belied his claim (Mt 19:20, Lk 18:21) and showed him as a sinner in need of salvation.

So Ryrie interprets Jesus as saying to the young man "Okay, you have made the claim to keep the commandments dealing with your behavior toward people. Now, be willing to prove your claim by selling everything and giving it to the poor." Jesus of course was not saying being charitable saves anyone (the reverse is true - that is, being saved results in a new heart, one that is charitable). What he was doing was "testing" the young man's declaration of "goodness" toward other people. He exposes the young man's pride (middle letter of pride = the big "I") and idolatry.

THOUGHT - BEWARE OF RICHES! It is fascinating that none of the Synoptic Gospels record any verbal reply from the young ruler upon hearing Jesus' hard teaching. Luke does not record that he went away but just that he became very sad. Matthew and Mark both tell us "**he went away grieving.**" (Mt 19:22, Mk 10:22) The fact that this young man made the tragic [volitional](#) choice to turn away from the "offer of a lifetime" reflects the fact that he had a greater love for his riches rather than for the Righteous One! Mark 4:19 (Mt 13:22) explains that "the worries of the world, and the **deceitfulness of riches** (READ THAT AGAIN! RICHES ARE LIKE SIN - THEY DECEIVE WITH PROMISES OF GRATIFICATION, BUT FAIL DISCLOSE THE ULTIMATE COST! cf Heb 3:13+, see Deceitfulness of Sin), and the desires for other things enter in and choke ([sumpnigo](#)) the Word, and it becomes unfruitful." Luke 8:14+ is similar stating that "The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way **they are choked ([sumpnigo](#)) with worries and riches and pleasures of this life**, and bring no fruit to maturity." Recall this story actually happened and this man came with a sense of urgency and earnestness seeking eternal life, but one moral of the story is that if one becomes attached to wealth or a desire for wealth (which is easy to do), this attachment will erode one's sense of urgency and earnestness, so that over time even an earnest person forgets what is truly priceless - eternal life!

God grant us by Your Spirit and Word to always **Beware of riches!** Amen

Ray Pritchard has some pithy points - When it comes to going to heaven, it's not what you've got that counts, it's what you lack (Lk 18:22)....It's true, isn't it, that money can choke out the things of God? There are a great many Christians who love Jesus when they make \$15,000 a year. There are fewer who love him when they make \$30,000. Fewer still who love him when they make \$50,000. Fewer still who love him when they make \$150,000. Fewer yet who love him when they make half a million dollars a year. There are a great many Christians who would become deeply committed to Jesus Christ again, if only they would go broke. Go home and think about that. I'm not saying we have to do literally what Jesus said here. But the principle is entirely true. You cannot love money and be his disciple. You cannot. He set the rules down 2000 years ago. That's just the way it is. ([When Having It All Is Not Enough](#))

Guzik - The man failed this challenge. Essentially, this man was an **idolater**: he loved money and material things more than God. This shows that both tables of the law will test men...the laws (Commandments 1-4 - Ex 20:3-11) having to do with our relationship with God (and with men - Commandments 5-10 = Ex 20:12-17). Jesus challenged him to put God first; to fulfill the law to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength (Deuteronomy 6:5). ([Luke 18 Commentary](#))

Sean O'Connell sums up Jesus' "strategy" to pierce the young man's armor of self-righteousness - "Have you really kept all the commandments? All of them? Every single one of them? Ever since you were young? Well, how about, 'You shall not covet'?" He puts it this way: "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mt 19:21). Jesus calls him to perfection, "perfect" in the sense of keeping both tables of the Law. He is to love others, especially the poor (i.e., widows, orphans, blind beggars, and perhaps Christ's followers), and follow (i.e., love first) Jesus. The rich man knew he lacked something. That is why he asked Jesus what he asked. But he thought whatever it was he lacked could simply be added to his life. But the one thing he lacked was a childlike dependence on Christ (Mt 18:17). So our Lord, seeking to bring this man to the point of such dependence, challenged this rich man to cut off his riches ("sell all that you possess and give to the poor") and challenged this rich ruler to cut off his self-rule ("come, follow me"). Here our Lord demands not almsgiving (giving something to someone) but everything (give everything to others and everything to me). He demands everything. Give everything to others-love your neighbor. Give everything to Christ-love the Lord your God. Well, such a challenge was too hard, too impossibly difficult. The arrow of Christ's command struck the young man's Achilles' heel. The weight of just the Tenth Commandment crushed him. This man who only moments ago knelt before Jesus enthusiastic and expectant now stood up, turned his back on our Lord, and "went away sorrowful" (Mt 19:22). Why? There is only one reason given: "for he had great possessions" (Mt 19:22), or we might rightly say, because great possessions had him. (See [Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth - Page 549](#))

ILLUSTRATION - A missionary poetess and mystic, [Amy Carmichael](#) of Dohnavur, described in her famous book Things As They Are sitting with a Hindu queen in her palace as the queen revealed her spiritual hunger. As the conversation developed, she kept pushing Miss Carmichael regarding what was necessary for salvation, and Amy attempted to deflect her, saying she should wait.

But she was determined to hear it then and, as she insisted, I read her a little of what He says about it Himself.

She knew quite enough to understand and take in the force of the forceful words. She would not consent to be led gently on. "No, I must know it now," she said; and as verse by verse we read to her, her face settled sorrowfully. "So far must I follow, so far?" she said, "I cannot follow so far."...(THE FOLLOWING QUOTE IS AN ADDITION FROM AMY CARMICHAEL'S BOOK) Then she looked at me again, and I shall never forget the look. It seemed as if she were looking me through and through, and forcing the answer to come. She spoke in little short sentences, instinct with intensity. "I CANNOT live here and break [my Caste](#). If I break it I must go. I CANNOT live here without keeping my customs. If I break them I must go. You know all this ("queen" addressing Amy). I ask you, then, tell me yes or no. Can I live here and keep [my caste](#), and at the same time follow your God? Tell me yes or no!" I did not tell her-how could I? But she read the answer in my eyes, and she said, as she had said before "**I cannot follow so far---so far, I CANNOT FOLLOW SO FAR!**"

"Reverence for opinions and practice held sacred by his ancestors is ingrained in every fiber of a Hindu's character, and is, so to speak, bred in the very bone of his physical and moral constitution." So writes Sir Monier Williams. It is absolutely true." ([Amy Wilson-Carmichael, Things as They Are](#))

That is, in effect, what the rich man said. He was overcome with profound sadness because he had so much money. He could not possibly bring himself to give it up. [Dante referred to this as "The Great Refusal"](#) It was, for from there he became a wandering star—lost, haunted by what might have been.(From Kent Hughes with amplification of the original quote from Amy Carmichael's book)

FALSE PRETENDERS

When the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Matthew 19:22

All persons who are alienated from God and outside of Christ are part and parcel of a mighty deception!

They are called upon to pretend that they can have peace of mind within and that they can be relatively happy and make a big success of their human lives if they have youth and wealth and morality and high position.

In that sense of what is going on all around us, David never had to apologize for writing that "every man is a liar!" (see Psalm 116:11). The whole human concept of success and happiness and inner peace, based upon who we are and what we have, is completely false.

The rich young ruler who came to question Jesus had wealth, morality, position and youth. But his very first question gave the clue to his own inner emptiness of life: "What good thing should I do, that I may have eternal life?" (see Luke 18:18).

He knew very well that there is not a person alive who has eternal youth or eternal position or eternal righteousness. So, like every other man, he had to make a choice!

ILLUSTRATION - Of the danger of riches - In Teaching a Stone to Talk (Borrow [Teaching a stone to talk : expeditions and encounters](#)), Annie Dillard recalls the tragic story of the [Franklin expedition to the North Pole](#). In 1845 a group of English explorers died because they were ill prepared for the challenges they would face. Instead of providing room on board their two ships for storing additional coal for the steam engines, these careless adventurers used the space for a large library, a barrel organ, china place settings, and cut-glass wine goblets. Needless to say, when they ran out of coal, as they did, their books and tea cups and ornate musical instruments were not enough to warm their freezing bodies. Every member of that expedition died. Sadly, 128 men lost their lives. Years later when the search party found the remains of the men who had set off to walk for help, they discovered one skeleton dressed in a fine blue cloth uniform edged with silk braid, sadly grasping in his hand a place setting of sterling silver flatware. What a picture of their deadly foolishness. This rich young ruler acted as foolishly as that dead British explorer. But instead of trying to carry sterling silver through the frozen Arctic, this man was trying to carry all his possessions through the tiny entrance into the kingdom of God (cf Mt 7:13+). And just as all those explorers had to do was make sure their ships had more coal and fewer luxuries, so too all this rich man needed to do was unhinge this huge weight from his back and walk as a small man, a poor man, a humble man, a childlike man ... walk in faith uprightly through the small and narrow way. (What a picture of the deceitfulness of riches!)(O'Connell)

Matthew 19:23 And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

- **That:** Mt 13:22 De 6:10-12 8:10-18 Job 31:24,25 Ps 49:6,7,16-19 Pr 11:28 Pr 30:8,9 Mk 10:23 Lu 12:15-21 16:13,14,19-28 Lk 18:24 1Co 1:26 1Ti 6:9,10 Jas 1:9-11 2:6 5:1-4
- **enter:** Mt 5:20 Mt 18:3 Mt 21:31 Jn 3:3,5 Ac 14:22

Related Passages:

Mark 10:23 And Jesus, looking around ([periblepo](#)), *said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!"

Luke 18:24 And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!"

And Jesus ([lesous](#)) said to His disciples ([mathetes](#)) - Notice in Luke's version Jesus addressed this to the young man.

Truly ([amen](#)) I say ([lego](#)) to you, it is hard ([duskolos](#)) for a rich ([plousios](#)) man to enter ([eiserchomai](#)) the kingdom ([basileia](#)) of heaven ([ouranos](#)) - Truly I say is frequently used by Jesus to introduce a solemn teaching. The emphasis is on the word **hard** or "with difficulty." **Enter the kingdom of God** in this context is equivalent to being saved or being born again. Worldly wealth blinds one to their heavenly need. Wealth is deceptive. Earlier Jesus explained in the parable of the soils that "And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, but the worries of the world, and the **deceitfulness of riches**, and the desires for other things enter in and **choke the word**, and it **becomes unfruitful**." (Mk 4:18-19+). No fruit, no root. No fruit, no evidence of salvation.

*Wealth is a human value with a voracious appetite
which binds a person to earth.*

-- David McKenna

Remember "**to enter the Kingdom of Heaven**" (or Kingdom of God) in many contexts (such as the present) is the "code word" for being saved or receiving the gift of eternal life. It is hard for the wealthy to enter because they tend to trust in their own resources instead of God's free gift of salvation.

D Edmond Hiebert - How hardly, "with what difficulty," indicates that wealth does not automatically exclude one from the kingdom, but it does constitute a handicap....In him wealth revealed its power beyond most other things in life to work a deadly effect upon the will when a seeker is confronted with the demand to choose between it and the kingdom. He had made many noble choices, but when he was confronted with this crucial decision, his wealth showed its strong power to weaken his will to choose the highest good. ...Jesus did not envy the rich but rather pitied them. It put them under a terrible handicap in their relationship to the kingdom of God, making it hard for them to submit to His rule in simple trust. ([The Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary](#))

Kenneth Wuest - The question of our Lord does not declare the impossibility of a wealthy person being saved, but the difficulty of getting him saved. How the words of James echo in our hearts, "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him?" (James 2:5+). (Borrow [Mark in the Greek New Testament for the English reader - page 204](#))

Matthew Henry Concise - Mt 19:23-30. Though Christ spoke so strongly, few that have riches do not trust in them. How few that are poor are not tempted to envy! But men's earnestness in this matter is like their toiling to build a high wall to shut themselves and their children out of heaven. It should be satisfaction to those who are in a low condition, that they are not exposed to the temptations of a high and prosperous condition. If they live more hardly in this world than the rich, yet, if they get more easily to a better world, they have no reason to complain. Christ's words show that it is hard for a rich man to be a good Christian, and to be saved. The way to heaven is a narrow way to all, and the gate that leads into it, a strait gate; particularly so to rich people. More duties are expected from them than from others, and more sins easily beset them. It is hard not to be charmed with a smiling world. Rich people have a great account to make up for their opportunities above others. It is utterly impossible for a man that sets his heart upon his riches, to get to heaven. Christ used an expression, denoting a difficulty altogether unconquerable by the power of man. Nothing less than the almighty grace of God will enable a rich man to get over this difficulty. Who then can be saved? If riches hinder rich people, are not pride and sinful lusts found in those not rich, and as dangerous to them? Who can be saved? say the disciples. None, saith Christ, by any created power. The beginning, progress, and perfecting the work of salvation, depend wholly on the almighty power of God, to which all things are possible. Not that rich people can be saved in their worldliness, but that they should be saved from it. Peter said, We have forsaken all. Alas! it was but a poor all, only a few boats and nets; yet observe how Peter speaks, as if it had been some mighty thing. We are too apt to make the most of our services and sufferings, our expenses and losses, for Christ. However, Christ does not upbraid them; though it was but little that they had forsaken, yet it was their all, and as dear to them as if it had been more. Christ took it kindly that they left it to follow him; he accepts according to what a man hath. Our Lord's promise to the apostles is, that when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, he will make all things new, and they shall sit with him in judgement on those who will be judged according to their doctrine. This sets forth the honour, dignity, and authority of their office and ministry. Our Lord added, that every one who had forsaken possessions or comforts, for his sake and the gospel, would be recompensed at last. May God give us faith to rest our hope on this his promise; then we shall be ready for every service or sacrifice. Our Saviour, in the last verse, does away a mistake of some. The heavenly inheritance is not given as earthly

ones are, but according to God's pleasure. Let us not trust in promising appearances or outward profession. Others may, for aught we know, become eminent in faith and holiness.

Matthew 19:24 "Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

■ It: Mt 19:26 23:24 Jer 13:23 Mk 10:24,25 Lu 18:25 Jn 5:44

Related Passages:

Matthew 7:13-14+ **Enter** (a command - aorist imperative = Speaks of necessity and even urgency and only possible by a supernatural work of [the Holy Spirit](#)) through the **narrow gate**; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 "For (term of explanation) the **gate** is small and the way is narrow (Jn 10:9, Jn 14:6) that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Luke 18:25+ "For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Matthew 19:24+ "Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Mark 10:25+ "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel(kamelos) to go through the eye(trema) of a needle(rhaphis), than for a rich(plousios) man to enter(eiserchomai) the kingdom(basileia) of God(theos) - The simple teaching is that it is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Jesus' point is that entrance into the kingdom of heaven is impossible unless God's Spirit does a work of grace in a person's uncircumcised heart and such a work is especially difficult for those who are bound to this temporal earth by their wealth.

THOUGHT- Isn't it fascinating that while most Americans would view the rich as privileged, Jesus consistently viewed them as "underprivileged!" Many (especially in the first century) see wealth as a token of God's hand of blessing on their life, but Jesus saw wealth as a major hindrance to entrance into the Kingdom of God. Wealth veils one's vision to the eternal treasures in Heaven, and numbs the mind to the reality of the eternal torments in Hell! Are you wealthy? The real question is are you wealthy on earth in time (temporally) or are you wealthy in heaven eternally?

NET NOTE - The eye of a needle refers to a sewing needle. (The gate in Jerusalem known as "The Needle's Eye" was built during the middle ages and was not in existence in Jesus' day.) Jesus was saying rhetorically that it is impossible for a rich person to enter God's kingdom, unless God (v. 26) intervenes.

Kenneth Wuest - Some teach that the needle's eye here refers to a gate in the wall of Jerusalem through which by means of much pulling and pushing a camel could finally be taken. The Greek of Matthew 19:24 and of Mark speaks of a needle that is used with thread, and that of Luke 18:25, uses a medical term for the needle used in surgical operations. It is evident that the gate is not meant, but the tiny eye of a sewing needle. This was probably a current proverb for the impossible. The Talmud twice speaks of an elephant passing through the eye of a needle as being impossible. It is therefore impossible for anyone whose love of riches keeps him from trusting the Lord Jesus as Saviour, to be saved. (Borrow [Mark in the Greek New Testament for the English reader - page 204](#))

John MacArthur -Some, unwilling to face the stark reality that the saying implies, have attempted to soften it. Noting the similarity between the Greek words kamelos (camel) and kamilos (a large rope or cable), some suggest that a copyist erred by substituting the former for the latter. It is unlikely, however, that all three Synoptic Gospels would have been changed in the same way. Nor would a scribe make the statement harder rather than easier. He might change the wording from "camel" to "cord," but not from "cord" to "camel." But even a rope could no more go through the eye of a needle than a camel could. Others imagine that the reference is to a small gate [in] Jerusalem's wall that camels could only enter with great difficulty. But there is no evidence that such a gate ever existed. Nor would any person with common sense have attempted to force a camel through such a small gate even if one had existed; they would simply have brought their camel into the city through a larger gate. The obvious point of that picturesque expression of hyperbole is not that salvation is difficult, but rather that it is humanly impossible for everyone by any means, including

QUESTION - [What did Jesus mean when He said it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven? See video](#)

ANSWER - There are several different schools of thought on what Jesus was referring to in saying it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to gain eternal life (Matthew 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25). The Persians expressed the concept of the impossible by saying it would be easier to put an elephant through the eye of a needle. The camel was a Jewish adaptation (the largest animal in Israel was a camel).

Some theorize that the needle Jesus was speaking of was the Needle Gate, supposedly a low and narrow after-hours entrance found in the wall surrounding Jerusalem. It was purposely small for security reasons, and a camel could only go through it by stripping off any saddles or packs and crawling through on its knees. The problem with this theory is there is no evidence such a gate ever existed. Beyond that, what sane camel driver would go through such contortions when larger gates were easily accessible?

Others claim that the word translated “camel” (Greek: kamelos) should actually be “cable” (Greek: kamilos). Then the verse would read that it is easier for a cable (or rope) to go through the eye of a needle. To believe this, however, brings up more problems than it solves, namely casting doubt on the inerrancy and inspiration of Scripture.

The most likely explanation is that Jesus was using hyperbole, a figure of speech that exaggerates for emphasis. Jesus used this technique at other times, referring to a “plank” in one’s eye (Matthew 7:3-5) and swallowing a camel (Matthew 23:24).

Jesus’ message is clear—it is impossible for anyone to be saved on his own merits. Since wealth was seen as proof of God’s approval, it was commonly taught by the rabbis that rich people were blessed by God and were, therefore, the most likely candidates for heaven. Jesus destroyed that notion, and along with it, the idea that anyone can earn eternal life. The disciples had the appropriate response to this startling statement. They were utterly amazed and asked, “Who then can be saved?” in the next verse. If the wealthy among them, which included the super-spiritual Pharisees and scribes, were unworthy of heaven, what hope was there for a poor man?

Jesus’ answer is the basis of the gospel: “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God” (Matthew 19:26). Men are saved through God’s gifts of grace, mercy, and faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Nothing we do earns salvation for us. It is the poor in spirit who inherit the kingdom of God (Matthew 5:3), those who recognize their spiritual poverty and their utter inability to do anything to justify themselves to a holy God. The rich man so often is blind to his spiritual poverty because he is proud of his accomplishments and has contented himself with his wealth. He is as likely to humble himself before God as a camel is to crawl through the eye of a needle.

Related Resource:

- See interesting discussion of [Frequently Abused Verses: What Is the Eye of a Needle by Cameron Buettel](#)

Matthew 19:25 When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?”

- **Who:** Mt 24:22 Mk 13:20 Lu 13:23,24 Ro 10:13 11:5-7

GOOD QUESTION WHO IS SAVABLE?

When the disciples ([mathetes](#)) heard ([akouo](#)) this, they were very astonished ([ekplesso](#)) and said, “Then who can be saved ([sozo](#)) Why would they be so utterly astonished? The Jews believed (obviously falsely) that riches were a clear sign of God’s blessing, so that surely all those who rich would be saved. But if the rich are excluded from eternal life, then how could anyone possibly obtain eternal life?

Hiebert says the idea of their question is “If a rich man can’t be saved, then nobody can.”

Norman Crawford adds that “The question is not, How can a rich man be saved? but, How can anyone be saved? The answer is that none can be saved unless God does it.” ([What the Bible teaches – Luke](#))

William Lane adds this background - In Judaism it was inconceivable that riches should be a barrier to the Kingdom, since a

significant strand of OT teaching regarded wealth and substance as marks of God's favor (e.g. Job 1:10; 42:10; Ps. 128:1–2; Isa. 3:10 and often). (See [The Gospel of Mark - Page 369](#))

Then who can be saved ([sozo](#)) - If the rich cannot be saved, then who can be saved? So if a rich man (like the rich young ruler) could not be saved, this would block even the disciples' from being saved. It was a shock to his disciples to hear that riches instead of paving the way to eternal life could actually function to block one's entrance into the Kingdom of God. The Jews believed that almsgiving was one of the keys that opened the door into the Kingdom of God. And of course who would be able to give the most alms? A rich man like this rich young ruler. And so they were astonished at Jesus' words!

The **Apocryphal Book of Tobit** and the book of **Sirach** make amazing statements (which helps me understand why the Apocryphal books are not included in the [Canon of Scripture](#))...

Prayer is good when accompanied by fasting, almsgiving, and righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than much with wrongdoing. It is better to give alms than to treasure up gold. ⁹ For **almsgiving delivers from death, and it will purge away every sin.** (ED: THIS PATENTLY HERETICAL STATEMENT IS CLEARLY COUNTER TO ALL NT TEACHING WHICH EMPHASIZES THAT ONLY THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS DELIVERS FROM DEATH AND PURGES AWAY EVERY SIN! cf "the free gift of God" = Ro 6:23, Gal 3:13, Ro 5:9-10 1 Th 1:10, 1 Pe 2:24) Those who perform deeds of charity and of righteousness will have fulness of life; ¹⁰ but those who commit sin are the enemies of their own lives. ([Book of Tobit 12:8-10](#))

As water extinguishes a blazing fire, so **almsgiving atones for sin.**([Sirach 3:30](#)) (Wow!)

NET NOTE - The assumption is that the rich are blessed, so if they risk exclusion, who is left to be saved?

It is notable that in [one religious tradition's catechism](#) we read "A conversion **which proceeds from a fervent charity** can [attain](#) the complete purification of the sinner in such a way that no punishment would remain." Beloved, this statement is backwards - "fervent charity" proceeds from a changed heart, a heart transformed at "conversion," a new birth wrought by the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:3-8) (Note relationship of salvation, faith and works in Eph 2:8-9+ and Eph 2:10+. Salvation first, by faith. Then works, also by faith). The rich young ruler would have been pleased had a similar statement come from the lips of Jesus when he asked Him what he must do to inherit eternal life! (See [What are indulgences and plenary indulgences and is the concept biblical?](#))

George MacDonald pointed out that "It is not the rich man only who is under the dominion of things; they too are slaves who, having no money, are unhappy for the lack of it.... The money the one has, the money the other would have, is in each the cause of an eternal stupidity."

Warren Wiersbe as usual hits the proverbial nail on the head writing that "The rich young ruler is a warning to people who want a Christian faith that does not change their values or upset their lifestyle. Jesus does not command every seeking sinner to sell everything and give to the poor, but He does put His finger of conviction on any area in our lives about which we are dishonest." (Borrow [Be courageous](#) Luke 14-24)

Astonished ([1605](#))([ekplesso](#) from **ek** = out + **plesso** = strike) ([imperfect tense](#)) means strike out, expel by a blow, drive out or away, force out or cast off by a blow. It is interesting to note that our English word "**astonish**" which is derived from the Latin word *extonare* meaning to **strike with thunder**! What a picture of Jesus' radical message which must have struck His hearers like thunder! Figuratively **ekplesso** means to drive out of one's senses by a sudden shock or strong feeling, or "to be exceedingly struck in mind". It means to cause to be filled with amazement to the point of being overwhelmed (struck out of one's senses). It encompasses the ideas of wonder, astonishment or amazement. **Ekplesso** expresses a stunned amazement that leaves the subject unable to grasp what is happening.

EKPLESSO - 13V - Matt. 7:28; Matt. 13:54; Matt. 19:25; Matt. 22:33; Mk. 1:22; Mk. 6:2; Mk. 7:37; Mk. 10:26; Mk. 11:18; Lk. 2:48; Lk. 4:32; Lk. 9:43; Acts 13:12

Matthew 19:26 And looking at them Jesus said to them, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

■ **But:** Ge 18:14 Nu 11:23 Job 42:2 Ps 3:8 62:11 Jer 32:27 Zec 8:6 Mk 10:27 Lu 1:37 18:27

**SALVATION IS ALWAYS
A MIRACLE!**

And looking ([emblepo](#)) at them One can just see Jesus riveting His gaze on these twelve dumbfounded disciples in order to gain their full attention.

Jesus ([Iesous](#)) said to them, “With people this is impossible ([\(\)](#)), but with God all things are possible ([dunatos](#))

A T Robertson says "The impossible by the side of men (para anthrōpois) becomes possible by the side of God. That is the whole point and brushes to one side all petty theories of a gate called needle's eye, etc."

Hiebert adds that "On the basis of the atonement, He can provide the perfect righteousness which man can never attain; through the work of the Holy Spirit, He can bring men to a change of heart, leading unwilling and sinful hearts to accept the divine provision. "Therefore all must depend entirely upon God. Such absolute trust in God makes possible a life of faithful discipleship (v. 28)." ([The Gospel of Mark: An Expositional Commentary](#))

Sean O'Donnell describes how God's Spirit used Jesus' teaching about the rich young ruler to push him through the eye of the needle! -- It was nearly twenty years ago that God, in his infinite and irresistible grace, used this very story in this very Gospel as one of the means of converting me to Christ. For the first half of my life I was told and believed the most common religious lie-that I was basically a good person who occasionally sinned, but did nothing that would ultimately disqualify me from one day entering the joys of eternal life. But then the Holy Spirit taught me what should have been obvious-I was a sinner. Not a good person who occasionally sinned, but a sinner (at heart a very bad person) who was in a continual state of rebellion against a good God and his good Law. I didn't love God. I didn't love others. And I certainly loved myself. But it wasn't just the first half of this passage but also the second half that the Lord used to change my mind and heart and will. I knew that God alone was perfectly good. I believed that Jesus was indeed the Son of God and the Savior of the world. But at that time in my life he was never my Savior. He was never my Lord, the supreme Lord of my life. And as I prayed to Christ those many years ago and asked him to forgive me and to clean me up on the inside, I also (with this passage in mind) told him (in so many words) that I would "sell everything," that I would put him first in my life-first above self, first above family, first above career, first above education, first above sports, first above every aspect and every love of my life. I told him I would be last, and he would be first! (See [Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth - Page 554](#)).

Ray Stedman - One of the pastors visiting us here this week was telling me about his congregation. He said, "I have a number of wealthy people in my congregation, and they trouble me, because" as he put it, "they dabble with Christianity." That is often true. I know of many wealthy Christians, and I find that it is rare to find one who is truly committed to obeying the Word of God. Most go along only to a point. Thank God there are some who do obey. God has reached them. I do not know how he does it, but only God can do it. He can break through, and he does, at times. Sometimes he creates in them a tremendous distaste for things and makes them so aware of an emptiness and hunger within that they lose all interest in affairs of business and wealth and money and, feeling the hollow mockery of it, like this young man, they begin to search out the realities of life. Sometimes a man has to suffer catastrophe -- almost lose his family, or get sick, or have some other disaster occur, before he begins to see things in their right perspective and comes to Christ in that way. I could tell you story after story of how God has worked to open rich men's and women's eyes to bring them back to the truth, and to show them the only way that ever has been provided. And isn't it interesting that if a rich man does come to Christ, he must come in exactly the same way as the poorest bum on skid row! He has to acknowledge his complete and utter need, and come as a guilty sinner, wretched and miserable and vile, and receive the gift of life at the hands of Jesus from the cross. There is no other way to come -- no other way! Rich men have to come that way, too. There is no special way provided for them, except the way that God has made for all. ([The Plight of the Overprivileged](#))

So Jesus makes it clear that man is unable to save himself and only God is able. This begs the question "Are you trying to be good enough to get to heaven (like many answer when ask how they plan to go to heaven)?" Jesus says it is IMPOSSIBLE. But then He says with God it is HIM-POSSIBLE! Have you been saved by grace through faith Eph 2:8-9+? Have you put your faith in Christ?" If not, cast off any hopes that you could ever be good enough to earn your way to Heaven and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ today and you will be saved from the guttermost to the uttermost (Heb 7:25KJV+).

Ray Pritchard - A rich man says, "If Jesus doesn't come through for me, that's okay. I've got my pension. I've got my stocks and bonds. I've got my options. I've got my golden parachute. I've got my safety net. If he doesn't come through it doesn't matter. I'm taking care of things myself."....I come to two conclusions and then I am through. Number one: As long as you make money and the things money can buy are the measure of your life, you will be empty and unfulfilled. Number two: Whenever you stop trusting in money and the things that money can buy and turn your life over to Jesus Christ, then and only then will your heart be satisfied. ([The Miserable Millionaire](#).)

Looking ([1689](#))([emblepo](#)) rom **en** = in or on + **blépo** = to look) means to look in the face, fix the eyes upon and so to stare at. It includes the idea of to contemplate or consider. Literally, as an attentive looking on someone or something fix one's gaze (earnestly) on, look at attentively. Matt. 6:26; Matt. 19:26; Mk. 10:21; Mk. 10:27; Mk. 14:67; Lk. 20:17; Lk. 22:61; Jn. 1:36; Jn. 1:42; Acts 22:11

Possible (1415)([dunatos](#) from [dunamai](#) = referring to power one has by virtue of inherent ability and resources; see study of [dunamis](#)) means powerful, able, strong. **Able** describes that which has sufficient or necessary power, means, skill, or resources to accomplish an objective. We saw this same word earlier in Mark 9:23+ "And Jesus said to him, " 'If You can?' All things are **possible** (dunatos) to him who believes."

DUNATOS - 32V - Matt. 19:26; Matt. 24:24; Matt. 26:39; Mk. 9:23; Mk. 10:27; Mk. 13:22; Mk. 14:35; Mk. 14:36; Lk. 1:49; Lk. 14:31; Lk. 18:27; Lk. 24:19; Acts 2:24; Acts 7:22; Acts 11:17; Acts 18:24; Acts 20:16; Acts 25:5; Rom. 4:21; Rom. 9:22; Rom. 11:23; Rom. 12:18; Rom. 15:1; 1 Co. 1:26; 2 Co. 10:4; 2 Co. 12:10; 2 Co. 13:9; Gal. 4:15; 2 Tim. 1:12; Tit. 1:9; Heb. 11:19; Jas. 3:2

Scripture repeatedly reminds us that God is the God of the impossible and that "nothing will be impossible with God." (Luke 1:37+)...

Yahweh Himself testified to Abraham "Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son." (Ge 18:14).

The LORD said to Moses, "Is the LORD'S power limited? Now you shall see whether My word will come true for you or not." (Nu 11:23)

Job learned and testified "I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted." (Job 42:2)

Jeremiah declared "Ah Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You, (Jer 32:17+)

God affirmed Jeremiah's declaration "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?" (Jer 32:27+)

QUESTION - [What does "with men this is impossible" mean \(Matthew 19:26\)](#)

ANSWER - On His final journey to Jerusalem before His death, Jesus encountered a rich young man who asked what he must do to receive eternal life (Matthew 19:16–30). Jesus took the opportunity to teach His disciples about the dangers of acquiring wealth and possessions, which can often hinder one's faith. Anything that gets in the way of our commitment to following God must be forsaken (see verse 21). When Jesus stressed how hard it was for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of heaven, the disciples were utterly astounded. They had adopted the prevailing belief that [wealth](#) was evidence of God's favor. "Then who in the world can be saved?" the disciples asked (verse 25, NLT).

Looking at them intently, Jesus said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26, NKJV). Jesus presented the key to salvation. In and of themselves, humans do not have what it takes to enter the kingdom of heaven. A person may possess every earthly blessing but remains powerless to save himself. Salvation is God's gift alone (Romans 5:15–16).

Riches tend to make us self-reliant, self-centered, and distracted by worldly pursuits. We put too much confidence in ourselves and our wealth and lose our childlike trust and reliance on the goodness and mercy of God. Nonetheless, it is humanly impossible to earn our way or work our way into heaven: "But—When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life" (Titus 3:4–7, NLT).

When Jesus said, "With men this is impossible," He meant that it is only by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ that a person can be saved (Ephesians 2:4–9; see also Acts 15:11; 16:30–31; Romans 3:21–24; 5:1–2; 11:5–6). Jesus is the only way to the Father (John 14:6; John 10:9; Hebrews 10:19–20; 1 Timothy 2:5). "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Belief in Jesus changes what is humanly impossible into unlimited possibilities with God. Through [faith in Jesus Christ](#), mere mortals receive "the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:12–13). As God's children, we receive the indescribably good gift of eternal life (John 3:15–16; Romans 10:9; 2 Corinthians 9:15).

Job and others in Scripture asked similar questions as the disciples, "How then can a mortal be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure?" (Job 25:4; see also 1 Samuel 6:20; Job 4:17–19; 9:2; 15:14–16; Psalm 130:3; Psalm 143:2; Malachi 3:2; Revelation 6:17). Apart from the Lord's intervention, becoming righteous before God is hopeless. With men, this is impossible!

But with God, “we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God’s glory” (Romans 5:1–2, NLT).

With men this is impossible means there’s no place in God’s kingdom for boasting about our own righteousness (Romans 3:27–30; 1 Corinthians 1:28–31). The apostle Paul expounded, “I have been [crucified with Christ](#) and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” (Galatians 2:20–21). Paul continued, “As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world’s interest in me has also died” (Galatians 6:14, NLT).

With men this is impossible affirms that any form of self-justification is useless. We can’t buy our way into heaven or work our way into God’s kingdom. The believer’s only hope of salvation—his only confidence in drawing near to God—is in God Himself, with whom all things are possible.

Norman Geisler - see [When Critics Ask](#) - MATTHEW 19:26—Is anything impossible for God?

PROBLEM: According to this verse, “with God all things are possible.” However, Hebrews 6:18 declares that “It is impossible for God to lie.”

SOLUTION: The context in Matthew indicates that Jesus is speaking of what is humanly impossible, whereas, Hebrews informs us that some things (e.g., lying) are actually impossible for God. Note that in the former passage, Jesus said, “with men this is impossible,” indicating that He was only speaking of what was humanly impossible, but not divinely impossible. However, there are some things that even God cannot do. For example, He cannot do anything that would contradict His nature, such as, cease being God, or be unholy, or do what is logically impossible (like making a square circle, or forcing people to freely love Him). God cannot make a stone so big that He cannot lift it, since the created cannot be greater than the Creator. However, God can do anything that is possible to do. He is all-powerful (omnipotent), the “Almighty” (cf. Job 5:17; 6:14; 42:2).

Matthew 19:27 Then Peter said to Him, “**Behold**, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?”

- **we have left everything and followed You:** Mt 4:20-22 9:9 De 33:9 Mk 1:17-20 2:14 Mk 10:28 Lu 5:11,27,28 14:33 Lu 18:28 Php 3:8
- **what then will there be for us:** Mt 20:10-12 Lu 15:29 1Co 1:29 1Co 4:7

Related Passages:

Mark 10:28+ Peter began to say to Him, “**Behold** ([idou](#)), we have left everything and followed You.”

Luke 18:28+ Peter said, “**Behold** ([idou](#)), we have left our own homes and followed You.”

Matthew 4:20-22+ **Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.** 21 Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. 22 **Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.**

WHAT'S IN IT FOR US?

Then - Marks progress in a narrative. In this case Peter's question is a natural reaction to Jesus' words to the rich young ruler - "Give up all you possess" (Mt 19:21). The disciples had done this (gave up their fishing boats, nets, etc) and followed Him. So with a touch of greed sneaking into Peter's heart (speaking for all 12), he asks in essence, "We've given it all up, now what's in it for us?"

Peter ([petros](#)) **said to Him** "Open mouth, insert foot!" Now that may be a bit harsh, because Jesus' response in Mt 19:28 certainly has no hint of rebuke, but quite the opposite.

Behold ([idou](#)), **we** (Peter speaking for all 12) **have left** ([aphiemi](#)) **everything and followed** ([akoloutheo](#) - [perfect tense](#)) **You** - Peter gives us an accurate descriptive definition of a genuine disciple of (believer in) Jesus = "**left everything....followed You.**" Peter was correct when he said they had done what the rich young ruler refused to do. On the other hand he is a bit brazen (in my opinion) using the interjection **Behold** ([idou](#)) as if the Lord might have difficulty listening to his declaration! Peter may have been prompted by

the rich young ruler who was unwilling to leave everything and follow Jesus. The idea of **left** is that they in a sense "sent everything away," that they yielded it up, that they had abandoned all to follow Jesus. He was not incorrect for we see their abandonment of all in Mark 1:18, 20+.

John MacArthur paraphrases Peter writing "We came on Your terms, didn't we?" he said in effect. "Do we thereby qualify for eternal life? The rich young ruler refused to surrender his possessions and his life to You, and he forfeited the kingdom. But we forsook our jobs, our families, our friends, and everything else we had in order to be Your disciples. We have repented of our sins and surrendered to Your lordship. Just as You commanded, we have denied ourselves and taken up our crosses for your sake. Doesn't that qualify us for a place in Your kingdom?"...**what then will there be for us?** "What are the benefits of Your kingdom for us?" they wanted to know "What do we have to look forward to as Your disciples?" (See [Matthew Commentary](#))

Kenneth Wuest on left - The verb is aorist, speaking of a once for all act. The **"we"** of course are the Twelve. Peter and John left a lucrative fishing business, and Matthew, a rich source of income from his tax-collector's office, to become the disciples of a poor itinerant preacher. Peter's question was in effect, "What reward will we get for having become poor for your sake?" The spokesman of the disciples showed by his question that they were still thinking in terms of **material** rather than **spiritual** riches. Peter's act of abandoning his preaching commission to go back to his fishing business, shows that this tendency still clung to him even after the resurrection of our Lord (John 21:3). (Borrow [Mark in the Greek New Testament for the English reader - page 206](#))

John Phillips - Peter, Andrew, James, and John gave up a prosperous business. Matthew gave up a lucrative career and all of the ill-gotten gains that he had amassed, we can be sure. They had all given up homes and families. (Exploring the Gospel of Luke)

Oswald Chambers was right when he said "Very few of us know the absolute "go" of abandonment to Jesus." (See [Chambers on Abandonment](#))

What then will there be for us - This reminds us our modern phrase "What's in it for me?"

NET NOTE - Peter wants reassurance that the disciples' response and sacrifice have been noticed.

Followed you in this context is a synonym for discipleship and here is in the [perfect tense](#) indicating they began to follow at a point in time in the past and are still following in the state of discipleship. The idea is that the disciples had made an irrevocable decision to leave all they had, and forever, and to follow with the Lord permanently. (**HAVE YOU CROSSED THAT BRIDGE DEAR READER?**) This reminds me of the **Chris Tomlin** song "[No Turning Back](#)."

I will follow you
I will follow you
No turning back
No turning back
No turning back
No turning back

This is my heart cry
Though none go with me
The cross before me
The world behind me

This is my anthem
My life for your fame
My every move bring
Glory to your name

Matthew 19:28 And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

KJV Matthew 19:28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

BGT Matthew 19:28 ὁ ἡσος ἐπεν αὐτοῖς· μὴ λγώ μιν τι μερὶς οὐκολουθεσάντες μοι νῦν παλιγγενεσθαι, τὰν καθ' ὅσον τὸ νῆρ που πῆρ νου ὀξῆς αὐτοῦ, καθ' ἑσέσθε καὶ μερὶς πῶς δέκα θρόνους κρνοντες τὰς

ὁ δεκάφυλος τοῦ σπαραλ.

NET Matthew 19:28 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth: In the age when all things are renewed, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

CSB Matthew 19:28 Jesus said to them, "I assure you: In the Messianic Age, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

ESV Matthew 19:28 Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

NIV Matthew 19:28 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

NLT Matthew 19:28 "Yes," Jesus replied, "and I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

NRS Matthew 19:28 Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

NJB Matthew 19:28 Jesus said to them, 'In truth I tell you, when everything is made new again and the Son of man is seated on his throne of glory, you yourselves will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel.

NAB Matthew 19:28 Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you that you who have followed me, in the new age, when the Son of Man is seated on his throne of glory, will yourselves sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

YLT Matthew 19:28 And Jesus said to them, 'Verily I say to you, that ye who did follow me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man may sit upon a throne of his glory, shall sit -- ye also -- upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel;

MIT Matthew 19:28 Jesus replied to them: "You can count on what I say to you, my followers. In the restoration, when the human one will sit on his glorious throne, you also will be seated on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

- **in the regeneration:** Isa 65:17 66:22 Ac 3:21 2Pe 3:13 Rev 21:5
- **when:** Mt 16:27 25:31 2Th 1:7-10 Rev 20:11-15
- **you also:** Mt 20:21 Lu 22:28-30 1Co 6:2,3 2Ti 2:12 Rev 2:26-27 Rev 3:21 Rev 20:4
- **the twelve:** Ex 15:27 24:4 28:21 Lev 24:5 Jos 3:12 1Ki 18:31 Ezr 6:17 Rev 7:4 Rev 12:1 21:12-14 22:2

Related Passages:

Matthew 25:31+ "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

Luke 22:28-30+ You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; 29 and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you 30 that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

1 Corinthians 6:2-3+ Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? (**ED:** WHEN? THIS CAN ONLY REFER TO THE MILLENNIUM!) If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?

2 Timothy 2:12+ If we endure, **we will also reign with Him**; If we deny Him, He also will deny us;

Revelation 2:26-27+ 'He who overcomes (ALL GENUINE BELIEVERS ARE OVERCOMERS SO THIS PROMISE IS FOR THEM!), and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE **AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS** (**ED:** HOW COULD THIS POSSIBLY SPEAK OF THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH? IT IS CLEARLY THE MILLENNIUM!); 27 AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS

THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father;

Revelation 3:21+ 'He who overcomes, **I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne**, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Revelation 5:10+ "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and **they will reign upon the earth.**" (WHERE? NOT THE "NEW EARTH" BUT THE "EARTH" IN THE MILLENNIUM!)

Revelation 20:4-5+ Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This (THE DESCRIPTION IN VERSE 4) is the first resurrection (ALL BELIEVERS TAKE PART IN THE FIRST RESURRECTION AND WILL REIGN, NOT JUST THOSE WHO WERE BEHEADED).

JESUS GIVES PREVIEW OF COMING MESSIANIC KINGDOM

And Jesus ([lesous](#)) said to them, "Truly ([amen](#)) I say to you - Again Truly I say ([amen lego](#)) introduces a solemn teaching.

That you who have followed ([akoloutheo](#)) Me, in the regeneration ([paliggenesia](#)) when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious ([doxa](#)) throne ([thronos](#)), you also shall sit upon twelve thrones ([thronos](#)), judging ([krino](#)) the twelve tribes of Israel - I believe Jesus is speaking about His coming Messianic Kingdom (aka the Millennium) as discussed more below. One well known writer says **the regeneration** "refers to the cosmic regeneration in the [eschaton](#)." (David Platt) What in the world does that mean? I am always nervous when writers use words/terms never found in Scripture, not even good paraphrases like the NLT (cosmic, eshaton)! I have no clue what Platt means by that vague statement.

In Acts 1:6+ the disciples asked Jesus "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" This is a reference to the coming Messianic Kingdom. Jesus did not say this restoration would not occur but told them "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority." Because of Jesus' promise in Mt 19:28 the disciples knew that one day they would reign with Christ in His kingdom on the earth. That was a settled fact about which they had no doubts. It wasn't if but when the kingdom would be restored to Israel. The disciples in Acts 1:6 were asking for something that was none of their business.

Another passage in Acts which relates to "the **regeneration**" is Acts 3:19-21+ where Peter is addressing a Jewish audience and says "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; 20 and that He may send Jesus, the Christ (MESSIAH) appointed for you, 21 Whom heaven must receive until (NOTE THIS TIME PHRASE) **the period of restoration** of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time." The period of restoration is when Christ returns to set up His Messianic Kingdom.

[Halley's Handbook](#) has an interesting comment regarding timing of **the regeneration** and **the period of restoration** - An argument to be made for the validity of an earthly millennial reign of Christ is something Jesus Himself said: "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28). Also, Peter said, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" (Acts 3:19-21). **(ED: HERE IS A CRITICAL POINT TO CONSIDER) Both of these passages refer to renewing something, to bringing it back to its former state.** It's unlikely that they refer to heaven—for heaven needs no restoration. It seems more likely that they allude to the restoration of the earth to its former godly state, prior to man's sin, when God reigned and walked the earth with His creation (Genesis 2).

It is interesting that the CSB translates **in the regeneration** as "In the Messianic Age" but in their commentary notes has **the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne**, reigning over the new heaven and new earth. This seems to confuse the Millennium with the New Heavens and New Earth, so I disagree with their comment. The KJV Study Bible also has a strange note writing "In the regeneration (Gr palinggenesia) refers to the renewed world of the future, the kingdom of righteousness which is yet to come: "the new heavens and the new earth." While the term is used for individual rebirth in Titus 3:5, here it looks to the future millennial kingdom where the apostles will judge Israel (literally)." Again, I submit that the New Heavens and the New Earth are not synonymous with the Millenium

which (if you accept a Millennium) precedes the New Heavens and New Earth.

John MacArthur on regeneration - Here the term does not carry its normal theological meaning of personal regeneration (cf. Titus 3:5). Instead, Jesus was speaking of "the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time" (Ac 3:21). This is a reference to the earthly kingdom described in Rev 20:1-15, when believers will sit with Christ on His throne (Rev 3:21). (See [The MacArthur Bible Commentary Page 1161](#))

Moody Bible Commentary - Regeneration (v. 28) is used again in the NT only in Titus 3:5 where it refers to the regenerating work of the Spirit for the believer. But here it refers to the future renewal of the earth when the curse is lifted (Ro 8:18-25) during the "new age," the millennial kingdom, when Jesus comes to reign upon the earth. The disciples will judge **the twelve tribes of Israel**. This is a significant promise because it shows that the disciples were not only the foundation of the Church (Eph 2:20-22) but also the leaders of the remnant of Israel (Ro 11:1-6). Jewish believers have this unique status as members both of the Church and Israel. This promise was probably made only to the twelve as a unique group, but the NT indicates that all believers will participate with Christ in His judgment of the earth (Mt 25:21; Ro 16:20; 1Co 6:2; Rev 2:26-27; Rev 3:21). (See [The Moody Bible Commentary - Page 593](#))

John Phillips on the regeneration - The Lord's answer leaped over the church age. What the Lord called "the regeneration" looks ahead to the millennial age-the time of making all things new, the coming golden age when the curse will be largely removed from the earth, men will learn war no more, deserts will blossom as the rose, and a centenarian will be a youth. During the millennium the Lord will rule over the whole world. Jerusalem will be the world's capital and Jews will administer the earthly empire. The twelve apostles will have authority over the twelve reconstituted tribes of Israel. Each apostle will control tremendous wealth and wield enormous power. The rich young ruler forfeited his place in the millennial kingdom for the sake of his puny purse. Judas would throw away his reward for the sake of thirty pieces of silver. Both might have helped rule an empire. (See [Exploring the Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary - Page 387](#))

Henry Morris - The "regeneration" is the "re-creation," or "restoration," of the primeval perfections of the earth before the Genesis Flood. This will happen after Christ's return.

Spurgeon - When our Lord shall sit in the throne of his glory, all things will have been made new. That dispensation will be called the regeneration: then shall the highest honors among their fellows of the twelve tribes of Israel await the twelve who followed Jesus, even to the loss of all things.

NET NOTE - The Greek term translated **the age when all things are renewed** (παλιγγενεσία, palingenesia) is understood as a reference to the Messianic age, the time when all things are renewed and restored (cf. Rev 21:5). The statement you ... will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel looks at the future authority the Twelve will have when Jesus returns. They will share in Israel's judgment.

David Turner on the twelve tribes of Israel - The description of the future kingdom in terms of the twelve tribes of Israel appears to justify belief in the eschatological conversion of the nation of Israel to faith in Jesus as the Messiah. This would be in keeping with Matthew's overall emphasis on the fulfillment of Scripture preeminently through the words and deeds of Jesus the Messiah. The followers of Jesus, the ultimate teacher of the Torah, constitute Israel within Israel, the eschatological remnant (cf. Rom. 9:6). In the end they, not the faithless shepherds who presently lead God's flock (Matt. 9:36; 10:6; 15:24), who will judge or govern the nation as a whole (21:43; Gundry 1994: 393-94; Overman 1996: 285). A different approach views this language as indicating that the Gentile church, which is understood to supersede Israel, will rule over the nations as a whole (Blomberg 1992a: 301; France 1982: 65-67; Hendriksen 1973:730). This understanding anachronistically renders Matthew's Jewish language as symbolic and dissolves Jesus's distinction between the disciples' rule over Israel (Mt 19:28) and the reward of all who sacrifice to follow Jesus (Mt 19:29). If the church supersedes Israel, this distinction would be meaningless. (See [Matthew Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament](#)) (See also discussion of [Replacement Theology/Supersessionism/Fulfillment Theology](#) - a belief with which I strongly disagree)

John MacArthur on regeneration -

"The term **paliggenesia** (regeneration) literally means new birth. It was used by Josephus for the new birth of the Jewish nation after the Babylonian Captivity and by Philo of the new birth of the earth after the Flood and after its destruction by fire. It is used only twice in the New Testament, here and in Titus 3:5, where Paul uses it to refer to the personal new birth of believers. In the present passage, however, Jesus uses it to represent the rebirth of the earth under His sovereign dominion at the time of His second coming. It will be paradise regained and a global parallel to the individual rebirth of Christians. (Bolding added) (Ed: E.g., [see comments](#) on Isaiah 35:1-10)

The earth and the world of men will be given a new nature, described in great detail by the Old Testament prophets and by John in Revelation 20:1–15. Just as they have been given spiritual life and a new nature in Jesus Christ but are not yet perfected, so there will be a rebirth of the earth that is divinely recreated. Although it will not yet be a totally new earth (Rev. 21:1), it will nevertheless be wonderfully superior to the present fallen and unredeemed earth. It was the belief of the Jews that Messiah would renew the earth and heavens, based on the prophecy of Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22. Peter called it “the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient times” (Acts 3:21).

All believers will sit on the throne of Christ (Rev. 3:21), exercising authority over the people of the earth (Rev. 2:26), while the apostles are uniquely ruling restored Israel. This cannot be the eternal state described in Revelation 21:12–14, where twelve gates in the New Jerusalem are inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes and twelve foundations are inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles.

At the time of the restoration of the earth, righteousness will flourish, peace will abound, Jerusalem will again be exalted, health and healing will prevail, the earth will produce food as never before, the lion will lay down in peace with the lamb, the deserts will blossom, and life will be long. The age-old curse that began with the Fall will then be limited, in anticipation of its being eliminated completely in the eternal state to follow (Rev. 22:3).

As God had long before predicted, the Messiah, the Lord’s Anointed, will then receive all the nations as His inheritance and have the very ends of the earth as His possessions. “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron,” the psalmist declared; “Thou shalt shatter them like earthenware” (Ps. 2:2, 8–9). Then the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, as King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16). This is a reference to the prophecy of Daniel 7:13–14, where God, “the Ancient of Days,” gives the kingdom to the Son of Man. Jesus is affirming the reality that He will rule in the coming kingdom.

At that time the redeemed of all the ages will also reign with Him. “Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him” (Dan. 7:27; cf. 1 Cor. 6:2; Rev. 20:4). The nation of Israel will be restored, and sharing Christ’s rule over her will be the Twelve apostles, who also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthias, who took Judas’s place among the apostles shortly before Pentecost (Acts 1:26), will join the other eleven on the twelve thrones (cf. Dan. 7:22 and Isa. 1:26).

Because amillennial interpreters do not believe in a literal thousand-year kingdom on earth or in Israel’s national restoration, they take the twelve thrones and the twelve tribes as being purely figurative. One such writer made no attempt to discern Jesus’ meaning but simply commented, “Now we have to wonder what our Lord meant by the twelve tribes of Israel.”

If Jesus was referring to a real reigning on His part when He spoke of His throne, He must be referring to literal thrones that the apostles would sit upon while literally judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And as already noted, this millennial truth is also revealed elsewhere in Scripture.

The Word makes clear that in the reign of Christ over the world, He will be sovereign and rule over Jews and Gentiles with righteousness, peace, and immediate justice. He will be worshiped as supreme Lord, and His kingdom will bring prosperity, healing, health, and blessedness. (See [The MacArthur Commentary](#))

Regeneration (3824) **paliggenesia** or **palingenesia** from the adverb **palin** = back, again, back again + noun **genesis** = origin, race and birth in turn derived from **ginomai** = cause to be [“*gen*”-erate], to become, to begin to be or to come into existence) means literally a birth again and so to be born again. In every day speech **paliggenesia** denoted various kinds of renewal -- the return or restoration of something, return to former circumstances, termination of captivity, restoration to health following a birth or illness. Greek-speaking Jews use **paliggenesia** to describe the land following the Flood (e.g. Philo; Josephus, Antiquities, 11.3.96).

Charles Swindoll - EXCURSUS: A FUTURE FOR ISRAEL? MATTHEW 19:28

Many Christians today are convinced that God’s plan for ethnic Israel has come to an end. Some believe that the promises about Israel being a glorious nation and receiving future blessing in the Holy Land have been abolished because of Israel’s past unfaithfulness. Others have determined that these promises have been fulfilled in a spiritual sense through Christ and the church. Some theologians propose that Israel has been replaced by the church and that ethnic Jews have been divorced by God, having no future in God’s plan. But the New Testament assures us that God plans to bring about the fulfillment of those promises through Jesus Christ. Although most ethnic Jews have been in a state of unbelief since the time of Jesus, God will one day bring a remnant

to faith in Christ and restore them in the land promised to their forefathers (e.g., Gen. 13:14–15). Jesus Himself promised the apostles, “In the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28). Before Christ’s ascension, the disciples eagerly inquired about the timing of that earthly kingdom when they asked, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). It is significant that Jesus didn’t reject their literal interpretation and expectation of a future fulfillment of these earthly promises. Instead, He simply told them that they would not be able to know the timing of this restoration (Acts 1:7–8). Years later, the apostle Paul addressed the issue of Israel’s unbelief by declaring that their rebellion would one day be reversed: “A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11:25–26). In other words, when God has accomplished His purposes through the church in bringing droves of Gentiles to Christ, He will again turn His attention to the nation of Israel and bring them to faith in Christ. We can see the beginnings of this future for Israel in the prophecy of the sealing of the 144,000 in Revelation 7:1–8. This will occur during the end-times events leading up to the return of Christ. Why is the restoration of Israel important? Because God’s very reputation as a promise keeper is at stake! With explicit reference to the calling of Israel, Paul said, “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29). It’s as simple as that. If we can’t trust God to keep His promises to Israel (see Jer. 31:35–37), how can we trust Him to keep His promises to us (Rom. 8:35–39)? Never doubt it: God will do what He said He will do! (See [Insights on Matthew 16--28 - Page 117](#))

Matthew 19:29 “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.

KJV Matthew 19:29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

BGT Matthew 19:29 κα π ς σπ ς φ κεν ο κ α ς δελφο ς δελφ ς πατ ρα μητ ρα τ κνα γρο ς νεκεν το ν ματ ς μου, κατονταπλασ ονα λ μψεται κα ζω ν α νιον κληρονομ σει.

NET Matthew 19:29 And whoever has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

CSB Matthew 19:29 And everyone who has left houses, brothers or sisters, father or mother, children, or fields because of My name will receive 100 times more and will inherit eternal life.

ESV Matthew 19:29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

NIV Matthew 19:29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

NLT Matthew 19:29 And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will inherit eternal life.

NRS Matthew 19:29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life.

NJB Matthew 19:29 And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times as much, and also inherit eternal life.

NAB Matthew 19:29 And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more, and will inherit eternal life.

YLT Matthew 19:29 and every one who left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or fields, for my name's sake, an hundredfold shall receive, and life age-during shall inherit;

- **And everyone:** Mt 16:25 Mk 10:29,30 Lu 18:29,30 1Co 2:9
- **brothers or sisters:** Mt 8:21,22 10:37,38 Lu 14:26 2Co 5:16 Php 3:8
- **for My name’s sake:** Mt 5:11 10:22 Lu 6:22 Jn 15:19 Ac 9:16 1Pe 4:14 3Jn 1:7
- **and:** Mt 13:8,23
- **inherit:** Mt 19:16 25:34,46

Related Passages:

Mark 10:29-30+ Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or

mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, 30 but that he will receive a hundred times as much **now in the present age** (REWARD IS IN THIS LIFE!), houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.

Luke 18:29-30+ And He said to them, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times as much **at this time** (REWARD IS IN THIS LIFE!) and in the age to come, eternal life."

THE R.O.I. IS IN THIS WORLD AND OUT OF THIS WORLD!

And everyone (NOT JUST THE 12 DISCIPLES) **who has left** ([aphiemi](#)) **houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms** ([agros](#)) **for My name's sake**, Jesus is speaking of counting the cost of following Him, of living for His Name (If you have stood up for Jesus at work, school, etc, you know exactly what this means!). Note that Jesus is NOT advocating abandoning families or domestic responsibilities in order to serve the kingdom. To say this would be counter to His command for children to honor their parents (Mt 15:4).

Will receive many times (more literally = "100 times") **as much** - NAS is not the best translation (IMO). NET has "will receive a hundred times as much." Luke adds *at this time* to the promise **will receive many times as much**. How is it believers receive **many times as much** now? This may at times be material blessings in this life, but far more important and likely Jesus refers to the spiritual blessings believers receive in this short time on earth. E.g., Paul wrote of these blessings in (Eph 1:3+) "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Note also the "reward" in Mark 10:30 of "persecutions"!

Stu Weber: Believers should not feel guilty about anticipating eternal reward. If it were a shameful thing, God would not have promised it so prominently throughout Scripture. The truth is that we need motivation, something to press on toward (Phil. 3:12-14). The eternal perspective, seeking God's prize, is the only mature perspective (Phil. 3:14). (See [Holman New Testament Commentary - Matthew](#))

[Moody Bible Commentary](#) - The promise of Mt 19:29 is not a literal one, since one cannot have 100 literal mothers! God is no man's debtor: if Jesus' disciples were shunned by family members, they would find within the messianic community a hundred surrogate loved ones, in addition to eternal life. (See [The Moody Bible Commentary - Page 593](#))

*All who give up anything for Christ
will one day reap enormous rewards.*

John Phillips on 100 times as much - What bank on earth can guarantee a return as great as "an hundredfold [10,000 percent]"? The Lord enumerated the things on which people most often set their hearts. He began with houses and ended with lands. In between He listed the most cherished members of the family circle. All who give up anything for Christ will one day reap enormous rewards. Although the promise doubtless has millennial and eternal overtones, many a servant of God who has given up the comforts of home and the security of wealth for the Lord's sake, has found himself mothered by hundreds of God's saints and has been the recipient of countless deeds of kindness in this life. Thus in Romans 16:13 Paul could write, "Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." Dan Crawford once said that the mother of Rufus was claimed by Paul as one of his ten thousand mothers in Christ. (See [Exploring the Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary - Page 387](#))

Matthew Henry: A hundred times as much in this life; sometimes in kind, in the things themselves which they have parted with. God will raise up for his suffering servants more friends, who will be so to them for Christ's sake, than they have left that were so for their own sakes. The apostles, wherever they came, met with those who were kind to them, and entertained them, and opened their hearts and doors to them. However, they will receive a hundred times as much, in kindness. Their graces shall increase, their comforts abound, they shall have signs of God's love, and then they may truly say they have received a hundred times more comfort in God and Christ than they could have in wife, or children.

[Holman Apologetics Commentary](#) on **100 times as much** - Critics say Jesus is giving a material incentive for following him, but in fact he shows that serving him for the primary purpose of receiving rewards and prominence is the least noble of motivations for a disciple. Those who serve for the purpose of gaining rewards will be last, but those who have served only for the motivation of responding in obedience to Jesus' summons will be first (cf. Mt 20:1-16). Peter's response shows that he too is driven by a less than pure desire for treasure in heaven (Mt 19:23-30). The rich ruler had refused to exchange his wealth for following Jesus, and Jesus then warned his disciples about the danger that riches pose to a person's eternal salvation. Peter flaunted the sacrifice that he and the other disciples had made to follow Jesus ("Look, we have left everything and followed You"), and boldly asked, "So what will there be for us?" (Mt 19:27). His question revealed a wrong motive. Jesus acknowledges Peter's sacrifice, and does say that he will

be rewarded, but this is the least noble of motivations for a disciple. (See [Holman Apologetics Commentary](#))

Utley - "Material blessings are not the experience of all godly believers, but the joy and abundance of the larger Christian family experiences are!"

THE ULTIMATE INHERITANCE!

And will inherit eternal life - Inherit reflects God's gift, just as an inheritance is not earned but is given as a gift. **Eternal life** is what the rich young ruler asked about—life with God, God's kind of life, life in Christ (now and then - Col 3:4+). "Then the redeemed will share life in its highest sense through the ages without interruption." (Hiebert) While Jesus is clearly describing the believer's future home in **the age to come**, it is true that even in this present (evil) age (Gal 1:4+) believers are abundantly blessed (even though it does not always "feel" like we are being blessed!).

Spurgeon - No man shall be a loser by the Lord Jesus in the long run. Every one that hath bravely forsaken the comforts of this life for Christ shall receive an hundredfold recompense. Our Lord makes up to the persecuted all that which they part with for his sake. Exiles for the truth have found a father and a brother in every Christian; a mother and a sister in every holy woman. Our Lord, by giving us his own love, and the love of our fellow-Christians, supplies a hundredfold compensation to those who have to leave wife or children for his sake. In being entertained hospitably by loving brethren, saints in banishment have had their houses and lands in a sense restored to them. To be at home everywhere, is a great gain, even though for Christ's name's sake we should be exiled from our native shores. Above all, in God we have a hundredfold recompense for all that we can possibly lose for his cause; and then there is the eternal life given to us, which no mansions and estates could have procured for us. In faith of this we look forward to the reign of the saints, when even here they shall inherit the earth, and rejoice themselves in the abundance of peace. Beyond this, when time ceases, there remains endless bliss; for we shall inherit everlasting life. Oh, that we may never hesitate to be glad losers for Jesus! They who lose all for Christ will find all in Christ, and receive all with Christ.

David Guzik quotes **Matthew Poole's** description of some of the ways we get our hundredfold:

- Joy in the Holy Ghost, peace of conscience, the sense of God's love.
- Contentment. They shall have a contented frame of mind.
- God will stir up the hearts of others to supply their wants, and that supply shall be sweeter to them than their abundance was.
- God sometimes repays them in this life, as He restored Job after his trial to greater riches.

Matthew 19:30 "But many who are first will be last; and the last, first."

- Mt 8:11, 12 20:16 21:31, 32 Mk 10:31 Lu 7:29, 30 13:30 Lk 18:13-14 Ro 5:20, 21 9:30-33 Ga 5:7 Heb 4:1

Related Passages:

Luke 14:11+ "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 18:13-14+ "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' 14 "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Mark 10:31+ "But many who are first will be last, and the last, first."

Matthew 20:16+ "So the last shall be first, and the first last."

THE GREAT REVERSAL

But many who are first will be last and the last, first - Note the adjective "many" (some surprises are coming for many!) This paradoxical statement reflects how God will judge men which will be different than how men judge men.

*God's estimation of worthiness for reward
may be entirely different than man's estimation*
-- John Walvoord

R.V.G. Tasker: The last verse of the section indicates that late-comers into the kingdom of God will be treated on an equality with those who have come in first, a truth which Jesus proceeds to illustrate in the parable which follows (Mt 20:1-16). (Borrow [The Gospel According to St Matthew page 188](#))

Got questions - What Jesus is teaching in Matthew 19:30 is this: there will be many surprises in heaven. Heaven's value system is far different from earth's value system. Those who are esteemed and respected in this world (like the rich young ruler) may be frowned upon by God. The opposite is also true: those who are despised and rejected in this world (like the disciples) may, in fact, be rewarded by God. Don't get caught up in the world's way of ranking things; it's too prone to error. Those who are first in the opinion of others (or first in their own opinion!) may be surprised to learn, on Judgment Day, they are last in God's opinion.

*in the next world, in God's kingdom, those who have been on top will be on the bottom,
and those who have been scrounging in the dirt will be crowned with glory*

Charles Swindoll on first...last...last...first - How encouraging Jesus' words must have been to those men who had literally walked away from their livelihoods to be close followers of Him! Jesus reassured them that they had not made a foolish decision in giving up everything for a life of discipleship. They may have given up fishing nets, but they would be rewarded with thrones. They may have abandoned houses, farms, family, and friends for the sake of total allegiance to the King, but they would receive "**many times as much**" when they entered eternal life (Matt. 19:29). **But not in this world. In this world, people like the rich young ruler are on top.** They're "**first**," having everything money can buy. Others, like the disciples, are "**last**," on the bottom of the social and economic ladder. But in the next world, in God's kingdom, those who have been on top will be on the bottom, and those who have been scrounging in the dirt will be crowned with glory (Mt 19:30). (See [Insights on Matthew 16--28 - Page 118](#))

John MacArthur - Jesus' words, "Many who are first shall be last; and the last, first," may have been a common proverb. But since He used it on several occasions and it is not found in other literature, it seems more likely that He originated the expression Himself. In the parable that follows, Jesus illustrated His intended application of the proverb. He states plainly that the theme of the parable is the kingdom of heaven, the subject He had been dealing with since the rich young ruler approached Him. That man wanted to know how to receive eternal life (Mt 19:16), which every Jew knew was equivalent to the hope of salvation and heavenly citizenship. Following up on that incident, Jesus warned His disciples about the great barrier that riches can be to entering the kingdom, and then declared the impossibility of entering by man's own resources and efforts and the possibility of entering only by God's gracious power (Mt 19:23-29). (See [Matthew Commentary](#))

Leon Morris - All this points to a reversal of the generally accepted order of things (cf. Mt 20:16). Those who are highly esteemed and held to be first in this world's order of things will end up last, in the worst possible position. The point is that they have put their whole effort into earthly success without reference to the more worthwhile life of service to which Christ is calling them. Inevitably when the time comes that earthly success is seen for the tawdry and temporal thing it is, they will rank with the last. That is what they have qualified for, and that is where they will be. The corollary of that is that those who are last here and now will often be found to be among the first in the life to come. They have not accepted the false values of the world but have set their sights on the service of God and of their fellows no matter what the cost to themselves, and they reap the consequences accordingly. The words are a strong warning against being deluded by earthly ideas and standards and shutting one's ears to the call of God. (See [The Gospel According to Matthew - Page 497](#))

Stu Weber: Many people who seem to be deserving of reward will receive less than is expected (though no less than they deserve). And many whom we might judge as undeserving will prove, in God's economy, to be first, receiving great reward. (See [Holman New Testament Commentary - Matthew](#))

David Turner has an interesting analysis - The disciples can be encouraged that their sacrifice will be rewarded, but they also are warned against presuming on the grace of God. The promise is that although they are presently "last," they will be "first" in the [eschaton](#). The warning is that although their prospect is to be "first," they could yet be "last" if they forget the way of the cross and God's sovereignty in dispensing reward. The unfortunate chapter division at Mt 20:1 obscures the fact that the parable of the landowner in Mt 20:1-16 continues the answer to Peter's question, as did the parable of the unforgiving servant in Mt 18:21-35. (See [Matthew - Page 476](#))

John Phillips on first...last...last...first - The Lord concluded His discussion of motives in the kingdom with a warning (Mt 19:30) and a parable (Mt 20:1-16). He warned, "*Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.*" In other words, we cannot trust human estimates about who is first or last, greatest or least. At the judgment seat of Christ there will be many surprises. It is likely that the Lord had Judas in mind when He gave this warning. Judas was counted as one of the foremost of the disciples. He was in charge of the finances of the apostolic company-and he fell through covetousness. The Lord also intimated that Peter should beware of a spirit of pride as he smugly compared himself with the rich young ruler. (See [Exploring the Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary - Page 387](#))

Moody Bible Commentary - The **first will be last; and the last, first** provides both reassurance and a warning. The statement in context states that God's grace extends to those who approach God in childlike trust (vv. 13-15). God will incorporate and advance them in the kingdom instead of those who enjoy power and prominence like the rich young ruler, which provides the warning in these verses. The same phrase is found in Mt 20:16, giving a slightly different look at God's grace there, namely that He is remarkably gracious and does the unexpected for His people. (See [The Moody Bible Commentary - Page 593](#))

Hiebert says "is a wise warning against the self-seeking spirit which lurked behind Peter's comment. The Twelve were warned that their priority in being called did not guarantee their preeminence in the future if they lacked the necessary spirit. The explanatory parable preserved in Matthew 20:1-16 reveals the spirit warned against. The rewards of the kingdom are given not on the grounds of priority in time or self-seeking service or human ideas of merit, but simply on the grounds of confidence in God and love for His kingdom. "It is a warning that the ultimate judgments belong to God who alone knows the motives of men's hearts. It is a warning that the judgments of heaven may well upset the reputations of earth." ([The Gospel of Mark: An Expositional Commentary](#))

Reformation Study Bible - Positions of honor or prestige in this life by no means assure heavenly approval; indeed, often the reverse will be true. Similarly, as the following parable illustrates (Mt 20:1-16), length of earthly labor may not correspond to one's heavenly reward.

Spurgeon - You remember the old Romish legend, which contains a great truth. There was a brother who preached very mightily, and who had won many souls to Christ, and it was revealed to him one night, in a dream, that in heaven he would have no reward for all that he had done. He asked to whom the reward would go; and an angel told him that it would go to an old man who used to sit on the pulpit stairs, and pray for him. Well, it may be so, though it is more likely that both would share their Master's praise. We shall not be rewarded, however, simply according to our apparent success."

William Barclay - Jesus lays it down that there will be surprises in the final assessment...it may be that those who were humble on earth will be great in heaven, and that those who were great in this world will be humbled in the world to come."

C H Spurgeon - excerpt from his sermon [The First Last, and the Last First](#)

WE must be saved if we would serve the Lord. We cannot serve God in an unsaved condition. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." It is vain for them to attempt service while they are still at enmity against God. The Lord wants not enemies to wait upon him, nor slaves to grace his throne. We must be saved first; and salvation is all of grace. "By grace are ye saved through faith." After we are saved, and as the result of salvation, we serve. Saved—we serve. He that is saved becomes a child of God, and then he renders a child-like service in his Father's house. That service is also all of grace. He serves not under the law of the old commandment, "This do, and thou shalt live;" for he is not under the law, but under grace. Therefore, sin shall not have dominion over him, but grace shall have dominion over him; and he shall seek to serve the Lord and please him all the days of his life. When we are saved, we must never forget that we are saved that we may serve; made free from sin, that we may become servants to God. David says, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds." Because our bonds are loosed, we are under new bonds, bonds of love, which bind us to the service of the Most High.

Now, when we come thus to be servants, we must not forget that we are saved men and women; for if we begin to fancy that, while we serve, we are working to win life by our merits, we shall get upon legal ground; and a child of God on legal ground is going back, he is departing from his true standing before God. Still remember, "Ye are not under the law, but under grace." But if you begin to forget your indebtedness to your Saviour, not only for eternal life, but for everything you are, and have, and do, you will be like the Galatians, who began in the Spirit, but sought to be made perfect by the flesh. You will be like the young man, whose question we have just read: "What lack I yet?" You will be like Peter, who puts in a sort of claim for reward: "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" You will be like the men who had worked in the vineyard from early morning, and who murmured because the penny was given to those who had only worked for a single hour. Christ will not have his servants under bondage to a legal spirit. Wherever he spies it out, he strikes it on the head; for both the service and the reward are all of grace. The service itself is given us of God, and God rewards the service which he himself has given. We might almost speak of this as an eccentricity of grace. God gives us good works, and then rewards us for the works which he himself has given. So all is of grace from first to last, and must never be viewed with a legal eye

Walter Kaiser - **The First Will Be Last? -** [Hard Sayings of the Bible](#)

The saying about the first being last and the last first is not peculiar to the teaching of Jesus; it is a piece of general folk wisdom, which finds memorable expression in Aesop's fable of the hare and the tortoise. But in the Gospels it is applied to the living situation during Jesus' ministry.

The saying occurs in two contexts in the Gospels. The first context (in Mk 10:31 and the parallel in Mt 19:30) is the sequel to the

incident of the rich man who could not bring himself to sell his property and give the proceeds to the poor. Jesus commented on the difficulty experienced by any rich man who tried to get into the kingdom of God, and Peter spoke up: “Well, we at least are not rich; we have given up everything to be your followers.” To this Jesus replied that, even in this age, those who had given up anything for him would receive more than ample compensation, over and above the persecutions which would inevitably fall to the lot of his followers, while in the age to come they would receive eternal life. Then he added, “But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

What is the point of the saying in this context? It seems to be directed to the disciples, and perhaps the point is that those who have given up most to follow Jesus must not suppose that the chief place in the kingdom of God is thereby guaranteed to them. It is possible to take pride in one's self-denial and suppose that by it one has established a special claim on God. “No amount of exertion, not even self-denial or asceticism, can make one a disciple. Discipleship is purely a gift of God.”¹⁶ Even those who have made great sacrifices for God are not justified in his sight for that reason; and even Peter and his companions, who gave up all to follow Jesus, may get a surprise on the day of review and reward by seeing others receiving preference over them.

In Luke 13:30 the words (but in the reverse order) “there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last” are added to Jesus' affirmation that “people will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God” (in Mt 8:11 this affirmation is attached to the incident of the centurion's servant). Those who come from the four points of the compass are plainly Gentiles, whereas some of Jesus' Jewish hearers, who looked forward confidently to a place in the kingdom along with “Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets,” would find themselves shut out. The free offer of the gospel might be extended “to the Jew first” (Rom 1:16 RSV), but if those to whom it was first extended paid no heed to it, then the Gentiles, late starters though they were, would receive its blessings first.

In Matthew 20:16 the parable of the laborers in the vineyard is rounded off with these words: “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” In the parable the last-hired workmen received the same wage at the end of the day as those who were hired at dawn. It might be said indeed that in that situation there was neither first nor last: all were treated equally. But the words had a wider fulfillment in Jesus' ministry. Those who were far ahead in understanding and practice of the law found themselves falling behind those whom they despised in receiving the good things of the kingdom of God. The son who said “I will” to his father's command but did nothing about it naturally yielded precedence to the son who, having first said “I will not,” later repented and did it. “Truly, I say to you,” said Jesus to the chief priests and elders in Jerusalem, “the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you” (Mt 21:28–32 RSV). This was a hard saying to those who heard it, who must indeed have regarded it as an insult—as many of their present-day counterparts equally would. But the work of Jesus brings about many reversals, and the day of judgment will be full of surprises.

QUESTION - [What did Jesus mean when He said the first will be last and the last will be first?](#)[WATCH VIDEO](#)

ANSWER - Jesus made the statement “many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first” (Matthew 19:30) in the context of His encounter with the [rich young ruler](#) (Matthew 19:16–30). After the young man turned away from Jesus, unable to give up his great wealth (verse 22), Jesus' disciples asked the Lord what reward they would have in heaven, since they had given up everything to follow Him (verses 27–30). Jesus promised them “a hundred times as much,” plus eternal life (verse 29). Then He said, “But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first” (verse 30).

Jesus reiterated this truth in Matthew 20:16 at the end of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, a story designed to illustrate the last being first and the first being last. What exactly did Jesus mean when He said, “Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first”? First, we should eliminate what He did *not* mean. Jesus was not teaching that the way to get to heaven is to live a life of poverty in this world. Scripture is clear that salvation is by grace through faith, not of works (Ephesians 2:8–9)—and independent of one's financial status. Also, Jesus was not teaching an automatic reversal of roles in heaven. There is no heavenly law wherein the poor and oppressed must rule over the rich and powerful. The rich aren't *always* last in heaven, and the poor aren't *always* first. Nor will believers who enjoy wealth and prestige on earth be required to somehow be abased in heaven. Earthly rank will not automatically translate into an inverse heavenly rank.

When Jesus told the disciples they would be greatly rewarded in heaven for what they had given up on earth, He was contrasting their sacrifice with the rich young ruler's lack thereof—the young man had been unwilling to give up much of anything for Christ's sake (Matthew 19:16–22). God, who sees the heart, will reward accordingly. The disciples are an example of those who may be first, and they happened to be poor (but their poverty was not what makes them first in heaven). The rich young ruler is an example of those who may be last, and he happened to be rich (but his wealth was not what makes him last).

The Lord's statement that the last would be first and the first last might also have held special meaning for Peter, who had just spoken of having “left all” (Matthew 19:27). Perhaps Jesus detected in Peter's statement a bit of boasting—Peter was on the verge of becoming spiritually complacent—as the rich young ruler was, but for a different reason. Jesus' response in verse 30 may have

been an indirect warning to Peter to always find his sufficiency in Christ, not in his own sacrifice. After all, without love, even the greatest sacrifice is worthless (1 Corinthians 13:3).

In the chapter following Jesus' statement that the first will be last and the last will be first, Jesus tells a parable (Matthew 20). The story concerns some laborers who complain that others, who did not work as long as they, were paid an equal amount. In other words, they saw their own labor as worthy of compensation but considered their companions' labor to be inferior and less worthy of reward. Jesus ends the parable with the statement, "The last will be first, and the first last" (Matthew 20:16). The most direct interpretation, based on the content of the parable, is that all believers, no matter how long or how hard they work during this lifetime, will receive the same basic reward: eternal life. The thief on the cross (Luke 23:39–43), whose life of service was limited to a moment of repentance and confession of faith in Christ, received the same reward of eternal life as did Timothy, who served God for years. Of course, Scripture also teaches that there are different rewards in heaven for different services, but the ultimate reward of eternal life will be given to all equally, on the basis of God's grace in Christ Jesus.

There are several ways in which "the first will be last and the last first" holds true. There are some who were first to follow Christ *in time* yet are not the first in the kingdom. Judas Iscariot was one of the first disciples and was honored to be the treasurer of the group, yet his greed led to his undoing; Paul was the last of the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:8–9) yet the one who worked the hardest (2 Corinthians 11:23). There are some who were first *in privilege* yet are not first in the kingdom. Based on the terms of the New Covenant, the Gentiles had equal access to the kingdom of heaven, although they had not served God under the Old Covenant. The Jews, who had labored long under the Old Covenant, were jealous of the grace extended to the Gentile "newcomers" (see Romans 11:11). There are some who are first *in prestige and rank* yet might never enter the kingdom. Jesus told the Pharisees that the sinners they despised were being saved ahead of them: "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you" (Matthew 21:31–32).

What Jesus is teaching in Matthew 19:30 is this: there will be many surprises in heaven. Heaven's value system is far different from earth's value system. Those who are esteemed and respected in this world (like the rich young ruler) may be frowned upon by God. The opposite is also true: those who are despised and rejected in this world (like the disciples) may, in fact, be rewarded by God. Don't get caught up in the world's way of ranking things; it's too prone to error. Those who are first in the opinion of others (or first in their own opinion!) may be surprised to learn, on Judgment Day, they are last in God's opinion.