

Matthew 19

This chapter addresses the challenge of managing life under the Law of Moses.

- Each of these stories presents a challenge to those who seek to manage their lives under the Law of Moses.
- There are areas that constituted management challenges: Divorce codes, and Money.

1. The Law, rightly understood will break us. (19:1-12)

“¹ And it came about that when Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee, and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan; ² and great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there.

³ And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?" ⁴ And He answered and said, "Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning *made them male and female*, ⁵ and said, '*For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh*'? ⁶ Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." ⁷ They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to *give her a certificate of divorce and send her away*?" 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. ⁹ And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." ¹⁰ The disciples said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." ¹¹ But He said to them, "Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. 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."

- The Pharisee's questions are not motivated by a desire to learn the truth nor are they designed to trap Jesus so much as see how he might manage a problem with following the Law. They probably expected him to get in trouble no matter what answer he gave. This reflects the Pharisee's preoccupation with managing life under the Law. We tend to display the same spirit with this passage when we get into the technical aspects of divorce.
- This question originated from a controversy in ancient Israel between two schools of rabbis. The question centered on the meaning of "some indecency" as a reason for divorce in Deut.24:1. One (school of Hillel) felt that a man could divorce a wife for any reason, the other (school of Shammai) argued that divorce could only take place if adultery was committed. The Shammai view was most popular at the time of Jesus and this produced a very liberal practice where women were often abused.

- Jesus answers by drawing attention to the principle behind the law. Legalism is best understood by a lack of understanding of the principles that underlie the codes.
- Jesus takes a more radical stand than even Hillel as indicated by the disciples shocked response. In verse 9 Jesus uses two different words for adultery. The first refers to “unlawful marriage” (breaking a betrothal, incest, marrying someone outside the covenant community), the second refers to sexual unfaithfulness within marriage.
- The divorce clause from Deut.24:1-4 is an example of the “damage control” principle that may be applied to a number of issues even today.
- The bigger picture however has to do with the way in which the Pharisees were obsessed with managing a Law and missing the principle behind it.

2. A child-like spirit (being unable to manage life and in need of grace) is the goal of the Law. (19:13-15)

13 Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. 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." 15 And after laying His hands on them, He departed from there.

- This is a reflection of what we saw in ch.18.

3. The Law sets the bar higher than we will or can reach. (19:16-22)

16 And behold, one came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" 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." 18 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; 19 Honor your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" 20 The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" 21 Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 22 But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieved; for he was one who owned much property.

- “what good thing shall I do” is a key in this paragraph. It assumes that we can keep the law so as to have eternal life. Jesus does not say, “No, you can’t do it!” but rather says, “Go for it but understand that the bar is much higher than you thought.”
- The rich young ruler had to make a decision. Could he live up to the demands of the law or was he going to be broken before it.

4. The first shall be last and the last first. (19:23-30)

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. 24 And 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." 25 And when the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" 26 And looking upon them Jesus said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." 27 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" 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. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last; and the last, first."

- The last verse (30) is a summary of where these stories lead us.
- For a more detailed explanation we can turn to Romans 1-5.

INSIGHTS AND LESSONS FROM THIS CHAPTER

- 1. DO WE REFLECT THE SAME IMPULSE SEEN IN THE PHARISEES IN THIS CHAPTER WHEN WE FOCUS ON MANAGING LIFE UNDER THE LAW?**
- 2. ARE WE BROKEN BY THE HOLY DEMANDS OF GOD? WHY OR WHY NOT?**
- 3. IS BEING "LAST" SOMETHING THAT WE CAN FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH? DO WE ENCOURAGE THIS IN THE LIVES OF THOSE AROUND US?**
- 4. MONEY IS A GREAT SHOWCASE FOR THE POSTURE OF OUR HEART? WHAT WOULD OTHERS CONCLUDE BY LOOKING AT THE WAY WE RELATE TO MONEY?**