

# Matthew 19:10-12

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*Following what the Pharisees said about marriage, disciples observe that it is better to not marry. Jesus then speaks about serving God as an unmarried eunuch for those who can accept this lifestyle.*

The parallel gospel account of this event is found in Mark 10:10-12.

After *Jesus* answered the Pharisees' test about divorce, *the disciples* came to *Him* about what *He* had said. Mark said that they asked *Jesus* to clarify what he meant about divorce. And *Jesus* answered *them* (Mark 10:10-12). They had heard how *He* told the Pharisees that Moses permitted divorce because of hard hearts, but that the only acceptable grounds for divorce was immorality (Matthew 19:8-9). The disciples also heard *Jesus* say, "what God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matthew 19:6).

What *the disciples* took away from *Jesus's* answer to the Pharisees was *if the relationship of the man with his wife is like this*, then it is better not to marry at all.

At first glance this seems to be an odd conclusion for *Jesus's* disciples to reach because the Bible speaks so highly of marriage (Genesis 2:18, 22-25; Proverbs 31:10-13; Song of Solomon 7:10-13; Ephesians 5:22-32; Hebrews 13:4). But *Jesus* does not challenge their charge. In fact, *He* appears to affirm their answer.

What did *the disciples* mean when they said to *Jesus*, *If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this it is better not to marry?*

The operative phrase is *if the relationship is like this*, meaning *like* how the Pharisees had described. *The disciples* may have been observing that *if* marriage is so lowly regarded; *if a man* can lawfully divorce *his wife* and send her away for any reason at all as the Pharisees suggested (Matthew 19:3), it is not worth the rigmarole of getting married in the first place. *If marriage is like this*, it is better not to marry. *If* what the Pharisees said about marriage was true, then *it is* impractical. Forget the ceremony, just have sex with whom you want to have sex with. Cohabit and partner with whom you desire, and when either party no longer wishes to do so they can simply leave. *If* no marriage promises are made and that's the arrangement, *it is* far tidier and potentially less harmful to both the *man* and the *woman* *to not* get married than to break promises by suddenly nullifying the marriage covenant for any reason.

*Jesus* does not challenge *the disciples's* takeaway about marriage being unnecessary if its only a matter of convenience. *He* let it stand. His lack of a challenge suggests that *He* approves of at least something important within their takeaway, if not the entirety of what they said to *Him*. This would underscore the importance of entering marriage with an intent for it to be a permanent relationship, "Until death parts us." Otherwise, it isn't really biblical marriage.

Jesus then seems to add an idea to what *they said*.

*He told them, Not all men can accept this statement.* The Greek word translated as *statement* is the term “Logos.” It means word, *statement*, or idea. The phrase, *this statement*, either refers to *the disciples’ statement* about marriage or it refers to the idea that *Jesus* was about to say to *them*. For reasons that are about to become evident, it likely is a remark prefacing what *Jesus* is about to say rather than what *the disciples* observed.

The Greek word translated as *accept* is “Choreo.” It is literally used to describe the filling of a vessel or space. John used it to describe the capacity of the water basins with which *Jesus* changed water into wine (John 2:6). Mark used it to describe the over-crowdedness of the room where *Jesus* healed a paralytic (Mark 2:2). It was also used as a way to describe a person agreeably digesting and holding ideas.

“*Not all men can stomach this idea*” might be a more graphic way to translate into English what *Jesus said*.

When *Jesus said, not all men can accept this statement*, *He* meant that not everyone will agree with, or be able to live according to it. *Only those to whom it has been given* would be able to *accept* it.

The phrase, “*only those to whom it has been given*” implies that God is the giver. God is the one who designates who *can* or who cannot *accept*, stomach, and live by *this statement* *Jesus* is about to make. God created each person uniquely. *He* designed and calls each person to a special destiny in His *kingdom* that is perfectly suited for that individual. God gives some people to be married in this life. And God gives others to be single (*eunuchs*). When speaking of marriage and singleness Paul told the believers in Corinth, “However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that” (I Corinthians 7:7).

*Jesus* then begins to speak of *eunuchs*. In the ancient world *eunuchs* described neutered male slaves. *Eunuchs* were often responsible for managing harems for potentates, or tending to female members of the royal household. Their testicles were removed to protect the chastity of royal females. Since *eunuchs* typically were given great power, this made it impossible for them to create offspring that would compete for future power. *Jesus* seems to be using *eunuchs* as a generic term to describe three classes of people who abstain from sex during their lives.

*For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb.* This describes people who are unable to have or do not desire sexual relationships from the time they were born to the end of their life.

*And there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men.* This describes people who have their genitals removed or disabled by men, for reasons just described.

*And there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.* This describes those *who* have chosen to abstain from sexual relationships *for* the purpose of *the kingdom of heaven*. Perhaps it describes people with other sexual attractions who choose not to

act on them in obedience with God's commandments. Or it might describe some who abstain from sex because being married hinders them from fulfilling the kingdom works in this life which God predestined for them (Ephesians 2:10).

The apostle Paul seems to be in this category (I Corinthians 7:7). This would include Jesus Himself, who abstained from sexual relationships and marriage out of commitment to His ministry. However, it seems other apostles got married. In 1 Corinthians 9:5, Paul mentions that other apostles and brothers of the Lord Jesus took along "a believing wife." Since "apostles" is plural and "wife" is singular, that indicates a) multiple apostles were married, and b) they followed this teaching of Jesus. Paul notes specifically that Cephas (Peter) is one who took along a believing wife. This historical fact supports the interpretation that the disciples were not expressing dismay at not being able to follow the "have any woman you want" philosophy practiced by some Pharisees, but rather that they were wondering if marriage was a good idea, given its difficulties. The fact that many of them got married anyway, in spite of knowing they were heading to martyrdom, indicates that they both understood this teaching, and still decided that marriage was worthwhile.

*Jesus* concluded His answer to *the disciples'* observation by repeating His preface: *He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.*

*He who is given to be a eunuch should live as a eunuch. He who was not given to be a eunuch should live married. Jesus's* point is that whether someone is celibate or married, everyone can use the unique self and life circumstances that God has given to them to live *for the kingdom*. Paul, who chose to remain unmarried, stated this:

"But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion."  
(1 Corinthians 7:8-9)

God has a place for people who are married on this earth within His *kingdom*. And God has a place for *eunuchs* and people who are not married in this life within His eternal *kingdom*. This is similar to what Paul teaches in his epistles:

"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."  
(Colossians 3:17)

"Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.  
(Colossians 3:23-24)

"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."  
(1 Corinthians 10:31)

*All men* should strive to follow *Jesus* and His commandments according to the unique design and purpose God has *given* them.

And if a man and a woman do choose to enter into a marriage covenant, they should never do so lightly. Biblical marriage leads to spiritual oneness (Matthew 19:5). Therefore, marriage for the believer should be approached as a sacred union that should not be broken. Otherwise, it is not really biblical marriage.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>10</sup> The disciples said to Him, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.” <sup>11</sup> But He said to them, “Not all men *can* accept this statement, but *only* those to whom it has been given. <sup>12</sup> 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*.”**