

**Jesus Teaches About Children**  
**Matthew 19:10-15**  
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Matthew 19 records interactions that Jesus had with the Pharisees, and later others, on His way to Jerusalem (Matthew 19:1; 20:17). The Pharisees sought to trap Him by asking *“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?”* While they asked about divorce, Jesus responded by teaching about the importance of marriage.

Jesus taught that marriage is between one man and one woman, because *“He who created them from the beginning made them male and female”* (19:4). Marriage includes leaving father and mother and being joined together (19:5). Since *“they are no longer two, but one flesh”* Jesus taught that *“no man should separate”* what *“God has joined together”* (19:6).

This led the Pharisees to conclude that Jesus believed there was no place for divorce whatsoever. Jesus connected divorce to adultery by stating in verse nine, *“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”*

**Jesus blesses singleness (19:10-12)**

The disciples of Jesus responded to the teaching of Jesus about divorce with, *“If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.”* Jesus gave a more restrictive teaching of divorce than any of the rabbis of the day. Specifically, Jesus was unique in describing remarriage as being adultery.

From the disciples’ perspective, if the restrictions were this limited, it would be better to avoid marriage altogether. This was not a serious statement as they were not considering abolishing marriage on a practical level, but rather this is simply an exclamation of just how restrictive Jesus’ teaching was.

Some interpreters have viewed Matthew 19:10-12 as prohibiting remarriage altogether. The words, “it is better not to marry” is then viewed as being affirmed by Jesus. However, not only does this ignore the expectation of remarriage found in Jesus’ teaching of Matthew 5:32, *“but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery,”* it also is odd to use the word “eunuch” since the divorced spouse could die, allowing for remarriage (cf. Romans 7:2-3).

Many people in our day have this same utilitarian approach to marriage. If marriage brings such difficulties, it is better to not marry and to simply cohabit. While this is obviously fornication, and opposed to the will of God, it does show the problem of evaluating a situation according to how well we consider it to please our interests.

The words of Jesus in Matthew 19:11, *“Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given,”* can be understood as applying either to what the disciples had just said or to what Jesus was about to say in verse 12. So then the two options are (1) not all can accept the claim of the disciples that it is better not to marry, or (2) not all can accept the teachings for Jesus about singleness.

It is better to view this verse 11 as referring to the words of Jesus since there is the clarifier, *“but only those to whom it has been given.”* This fits far better with the idea that some have been given the ability to remain unmarried for the sake of the kingdom of God (19:12), than it does that it is truly better not to marry. For most, *“it is better to marry than to burn with passion”* (1 Corinthians 7:9). This also fits the word “statement” or “saying” in verse 11 (literally meaning “teaching,” which is what Jesus did)

In order to further teach about those to whom the ability to remain unmarried has been given, Jesus describes three types of eunuchs.

Jesus references the eunuchs that were well known by the disciples, namely, *“eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men.”* A eunuch is a male who has been castrated in order for them to serve certain functions for their rulers. This practice was very widespread in ancient times and was done for the purpose of having servants for the ruler, their wives, and concubines. Castration was done to eliminate the threat of unwanted sexual behavior, as well as weakening the male through the near elimination of the hormone testosterone.

Over time, eunuchs who proved themselves reliable would be granted greater responsibility, including in supervisory positions. The term eventually came to include royal officials whose role was in other official capacities. Herod the Great employed eunuchs, according to the historian Josephus.

The Old Testament references eunuchs dozens of times, so they were familiar to the people of Israel. They were specifically excluded from the corporate worship gatherings in Israel, *“No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the LORD”* (Deuteronomy 23:1).

This shows the great significance of the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:26-40. This is the fulfillment of Isaiah 56:3-5, *“Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, ‘The LORD will surely separate me from his people’; and let not the eunuch say, ‘Behold, I am a dry tree.’ For thus says the LORD: ‘To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.’”* Outcasts such as eunuchs were now a part of the kingdom of God.

In contrast to those who were forced to be eunuchs by men, Jesus also references those who were natural eunuchs, *“For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb.”* There are a very small percentage of males who are born without the ability to procreate. There are various forms of congenital infertility or congenital sterility, such as Klinefelter syndrome (those with an XXY chromosome), cryptorchidism (undescended testes, impacting sperm production, and often resolves itself naturally), azoospermia (where no sperm is present in the semen), and Hypogonadism (low testosterone levels affecting sperm production).

While adult males who were born without the ability to procreate are quite rare, they certainly exist and are undoubtedly who Jesus must have referred to as those *“who were born that way from their mother’s womb.”* However, there is more to the meaning of eunuch than simply the ability to procreate. These physical conditions of congenital infertility would be impossible to know with the medical knowledge of the first century. In the days of Jesus, people were considered as eunuchs on the basis of their function, appearance, and behavior. Certainly very low, or non-existent testosterone levels, whether from castration or natural means, results in physical and behavioral changes.

Bible interpreters have considered those who were born eunuchs to be those without a normal sexual organ or lacking in normal sexual urges. This has been taken to include those who have homosexual inclinations. Certainly, the fall of man has brought on more than just physical abnormalities. We should not underestimate the degree that mankind suffers from sin, including the effect on our desires and inclinations. However, it is difficult to determine conclusively whether such sexual inclinations are established before birth.

Even if homosexual attraction was included in those who were born eunuchs, this must not be taken to support homosexual activity (Romans 1:26–27, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, and 1 Timothy 1:10). We must also refrain from any lustful desire to pursue any sexuality that is opposed to the revealed will of God.

The main point of Jesus' teaching about eunuchs was His final statement, *"there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven."* This is neither forced or natural, but chosen. This choice was to refrain from sexual activity for a higher purpose, namely, the kingdom of heaven.

Like with those made eunuchs by men and those born that way from their mother's womb, this was not the original intention of God in creation. God's original plan was for the man and the woman to procreate, *"God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth'"* (Genesis 1:28). However, with the fall has come circumstances that lead to people living outside of the norm, including those who remain single.

Choosing to be unmarried for the sake of the kingdom of God is not common, nor is it intended to be. This is clear from Jesus' words, *"He who is able to accept this, let him accept it."* Those who have been granted the God given desire to receive this statement for themselves, should do so. For those, it is indeed better not to marry. Jesus Himself was one who *made "themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven."*

Paul the apostle was one who recognized the role of choosing to remain unmarried for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, both in his life and his teaching. *"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; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, 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. 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"* (1 Corinthians 7:32-35). This practice is particularly significant in times of difficulty, or *"in view of this present distress"* (1 Corinthians 7:26).

Neither Jesus nor the apostles considered singleness as an intrinsically better state than marriage (1 Timothy 4:1-3; Hebrews 13:4). They viewed it as God's special calling for some of His servants in order to be of greater service to God. Yet marriage was never prohibited (1 Corinthians 7:9, 28).

Many apostles were married and able to serve the Lord fruitfully, *"Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?"* (1 Corinthians 9:5). We must accept and respect the choices of our brothers and sisters in Christ in respect to how the Lord has gifted them in service to Him.

### **Jesus blesses children (19:13-15)**

After recording the teaching of Jesus about marriage and singleness, Matthew records Jesus' words about children. While Jesus' words "*made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of God*" implies no children, we learn that Jesus truly embraced a ministry to children in Matthew 19:13-15. This section on children fits with the theme of marriage as children were considered to be the normal result of marriage.

When "*some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray*" this was not uncommon in Matthew's Gospel. We have seen many cases of people being brought to Jesus for ministry (Matthew 4:24; 8:16; 9:2, 32; 12:22; 14:35; 17:16). Children were brought to rabbis in the first century, and laying hands on the children to pray was also a practice of the day.

Whether the disciples rebuked those children themselves or those who brought the children to Jesus, or both, is somewhat unclear. One might think the disciples would be rebuking those overseeing the children and who allowed them to come to Jesus were rebuked, but then Jesus told the disciples to "*let the children alone*" in the next verse. On the other hand, the parallel account of this incident in Luke 18:15 describes the children as infants, "*And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them.*" Therefore, it is more likely that the disciples were rebuking those bringing the children to Jesus.

However, what is clear is that the disciples had considered these children to be a bother to Jesus. The disciples viewed the ministry of Jesus to others to be more important than His ministry to children. Children were seen as being less significant than adults by the whole of the Jewish society. Children were to learn and grow, but not to bother the adults.

The disciples of Jesus acted like Jesus was as some professional ministers think of themselves today. The well-known are too important to be approached by the mere average people. They are not readily accessible but have distanced themselves by establishing gatekeepers to screen their involvement with people.

The disciples' rebuke was rebuked by Jesus, "*Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me.*" Our Lord's welcome of these children is in stark contrast to the disciples' disdain for these children. They were hindering His ministry.

In the prior chapter, Jesus also spoke of children (Matthew 18:1-6). However, in Matthew 18, children were used as a metaphor for the humility that was required to be great in the kingdom of heaven. The true believers in Jesus would have the trust of a child and in child-like humility follow Jesus. Here Jesus' focus is ministry to the children themselves.

Jesus did not consider Himself to be bothered by the children. His reason for why children should be granted access to Him was *"for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."* Importantly, Jesus does not say that the kingdom of heaven belongs to children, but rather He said the kingdom of heaven belongs to those like them. Both Mark and Luke emphasized Jesus' words about the childlike faith of those who believe.

Some interpret Matthew 19:14 as proof that children who die before the age where they can be held to account for their rejection of God will be part of the kingdom of heaven. Given the follow-up by Jesus in Luke 18:17, *"Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all,"* it is doubtful that Jesus was making a declaration of the eternal salvation of all infants. He is again using these children to make His point about true saving faith. While all infants may well be a part of the kingdom of God, we can trust the Lord for His good and proper end in this matter.

Jesus welcomed these children and, as was the custom of the time (Acts 6:6; 13:3), laid His hands on them to bless them (Mark 10:16). This showed His affection for these children and His desire to receive those who come to Him humbly. Since Luke connected this blessing with how one receives the kingdom of God, we can know that this was not a model for infant baptism or baby dedications.

Yet Jesus did consider these children as worthy to come to Him and rebuked the disciples for seeking to pass them over. This demonstrates the importance of ministry to children, both in a church and beyond the children of the church. They should not be hindered, but accommodated. To seek to ignore the special needs that children have in learning about the Lord is tantamount to hindering them from faith. Ministries that specifically address the teaching of children in a manner that they can understand and eagerly participate in are critical for any healthy church.

Matthew concludes this section of his Gospel by noting that Jesus *"departed from there."* This means that Jesus continued along His journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (Matthew 19:1; 20:17) through the region on the eastern side of the Jordan River. The break in the narrative concludes the teaching of Jesus about the family.

## **Conclusion**

Marriage has been designed by God as His means to populate the earth (Genesis 1:28). It was never His intention for marriage to end in divorce. Divorce was an accommodation in the Law to manage the sinfulness of man. The result of unbiblical divorce is adultery.

Yet the solution to this problem of man's sinfulness in marriage is not avoiding marriage but rather to live for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Some are gifted with the ability to remain single for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (19:12). Yet those who marry must also "*seek first His kingdom and His righteousness*" (Matthew 6:33), and do so according to the will of God, and not causing adultery.

The normal result of marriage is children. Children were viewed by Jesus more highly than they were viewed by the Jews, and even His own disciples. We can consider children as needing to be taught by adults, but we also overlook what children can teach us. Jesus used children to show the kind of faith that we must have in God.

Whenever we are not humble, like a little one, sin begins to manifest itself in our lives. This can destroy marriages, create adulterous relationships, divided churches, and ultimately eternal destruction. "*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling*" (Proverbs 16:18).