

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

MATTHEW 17:24 - 18:35

“A man pays a *luxury tax* on his billfold. An *income tax* on the stuff he puts in it. A *sales tax* on whatever he takes out. And an *inheritance tax* if there’s anything left in it when he dies.” Well, it’s *income tax time* again. The tax filing deadline is just around the corner. You have just two more days to mail off your 1040 forms.

Have you ever noticed the timing of the tax deadline - April 15th is half way between *April’s Fools Day* and *May Day* - the calculations that occur in April start out, “*this has got to be a joke*” - and end up, “*I’m in big trouble...*”

This year April 23 is **Tax Freedom Day**. The average American works 74 days to pay his federal taxes and 39 days to pay state and local taxes. That means we are working for the government from January 1st until April 23rd this year.

But Jesus didn’t put near that much work into paying the Temple tax.

In the final section of Matthew 17 He pays His tax in a most unusual way...

Verse 24, “**When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, "Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?" He said, "Yes."** In ancient Israel the Temple was the meeting place between God and His people - and there were expenses involved in its operation and upkeep.

Under the Law of Moses its needs were provided for by a

Temple tax.

According to Exodus 30:13, every Jewish male, 20 years-old and older, was required to pay an annual tax of a half-shekel. The tax was collected in the spring of the year. This was the fall so Jesus was late on His payment.

Verse 25, “When he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, “What do you think, Simon?” It’s funny! When the collection agent asked Peter if his Master paid taxes he snapped back in defense of Jesus. *Yes, he pays taxes.*

Peter was saving face. Jesus was no deadbeat, irresponsible, duty-evader.

But the more he thought about the Temple tax he wasn’t quite sure...

So Jesus asks him, “From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?” Peter said to Him, “From strangers.” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are free.” Taxes supported the royal family.

The king and his sons didn’t pay taxes. They were supported by the taxes.

Likewise, Jesus was Son of God - King of the Jews – Owner of the Temple. He wasn’t supposed to pay tax. The people were obligated to pay the tax to Him.

“Nevertheless, lest we offend them...” Technically, Jesus didn’t have to pay the Temple tax, but He does. Evidently, there’re some battles not worth fighting over.

It’s been said, “A bulldog can whip a skunk, but is it really

worth the effort.”

Not every cause is worth the sacrifice. Not every hill is worthy dying to win.

Here Jesus takes a pragmatic approach. Trying to prove He was exempt from taxes would accomplish little. For the moment it was better to just pay the tax.

But He does so in a way Matthew will never forget...

Jesus tells Peter, “Go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you.” Here’s *the fish story of all fish stories*.

But Peter obeys. He drops a hook - pulls up a fish - opens his mouth – *and bingo*, a full shekel! The exact coin to cover the tax liability for he and Jesus.

This was a miracle of timing...

Years earlier someone dropped a shekel into the lake. Months earlier the coin was swallowed by a fish. For weeks this fish had may've been swimming in a lake 14 miles long, by 7½ miles across, by 200 feet deep. One day it swims up the shore at the same time Peter’s hook hits the water? *What are the odds?*

God’s providence arranges this miracle.

Hey, Jesus was a handy guy to have around...

Need to feed 5000 people... hand Jesus a sack lunch.
Have an issue that’s hemorrhaging... reach out and grab His garment.

Delinquent on your taxes... go down to the lake and catch a

fish!

Here's good news for April tax filers! Jesus loves us so much He even cares about delinquent taxes. With two days left, listen to what Jesus tells you to do!

We'll see you at the fishing hole over at Stone Mountain Lake!

It's interesting, of the four gospel writers only Matthew mentioned this story.

And why Matthew...? He was the former tax collector – an IRS agent. Paying taxes was his specialty. And Matthew had never seen taxes paid quite like this...

College football has the "Heisman" – the NFL has the "Maxwell" - hockey has the "Hart Memorial" – these are the trophies that honor each sport's MVP.

Sadly, the idea of recognizing the best doesn't stop in sports.

It runs over even into church. We clamor for recognition, and desire to stand out in the crowd. It's more than wanting to *do our best* (a good motivation) - it's wanting to *be the best* (a bad motivation). Moving up the pecking order isn't reserved for school, or work, or sports – sadly, it often occurs at church.

In fact, selfish desire even raised its ugly head among the first disciples.

The disciples want Jesus to name an MVP. Chapter 18 begins, "At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

Obviously, the disciples had argued with each other over who was the greatest. Now they wanted Jesus to end the debate. Who's **MVD** - *most valuable disciple*?

This is like praising the brilliance of the moon, while ignoring the sun. The moon has no brightness of its own. It's a reflection. So it is with us. The Christian isn't the source of the good he exhibits. He or she is a reflection the glory of Jesus.

Jesus sets them straight in verse 2, "Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." I picture Jesus utilizing here some high drama.

He walks around the disciples, as if He's about to pick the cream of the crop. The disciples are stirred. They're pulse races. They're beaming with pride...

The disciples are working on their acceptance speeches when Jesus walks right past them, picks up Dennis the Menace, and says "*Here's your MVP...*"

Once, an old man entered a toy store. He gazed in wonder at the electric train rumbling around the track. With a gleam in his eye he motioned for the clerk.

Pointing to the train, he said, "*I'll take one of those!*"

The sales girl responded, "*My, your grandson will really enjoy that.*" To which the elderly fellow replied, "*You know I*

think you're right. Better make that two."

There's a famous line that goes, "You are only as old as you think." Jesus says if you want to be great for God you have to be converted to a child-like faith.

A little child is *sincere, sensitive, simple, and submissive*. An adult is *two-faced, too-calloused, too-complicated, and too-conceited*. Hey, when it comes to faith we need to turn back the clock, and return to child-like faith. A child is Jesus' MVP.

Verse 5, "Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me."

To Jesus, both *the kindness of a child* – and *kindness toward a child* – was a sign of spiritual greatness. Kids today are sometimes viewed as a nuisance, but in the ancient world it was worse. Infants were left for dead, or sold into slavery...

Parents had total authority over kids – even to harm them if they so desired.

But Jesus and Christianity changed the world's attitude toward children much the way it did the pagan perspective toward woman. Theologian, BB Warfield, once wrote, "Childhood owed as much to the Gospel as did womanhood."

Jesus' love for kids shaped western civilization's attitude toward childhood.

Verse 6, "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the

depth of the sea.” Jesus sounds a little like the Jewish Mafia. Mess with His children and you’ll go swimming in a concrete wetsuit.

“Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes...”
"Offence" means "to throw off course."

I think of this verse not only when I hear of a pedophile, or a drug dealer, or cult member – but when I hear of an educator who tries to attack a child’s faith. Woe to a college professor who tries to rattle a student’s faith with atheistic propaganda.

Woe to the *movie producer*, or *music promoter* who wants to corrupt our kids.

A fallen world will inevitably be a wicked place, but woe to the wicked person in the world who seeks to spread its perversion. *God’s judgment can be severe.*

That’s why we need to deal severely with our sin. “If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.” It’s sad that over the years people have taken these words literally.

When Jesus says "cut off a hand or eye" he’s using hyperbole or emphasis by exaggeration... If there’s lust in your heart you can lust with one eye as well as two. You can lust behind a patch. You can chop off both hands and sin with

your nubs.

Jesus wants us to identify the cause of our sin – and deal with it decisively. To overcome addictive sin you have to take drastic action – do whatever it takes.

"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven."

Here's one of the places where we get the idea of **"guardian angels."**

Apparently, each child of God has an angel that's dispatched to protect them. When you harm a child of God – especially an innocent child - you'll face both God's judgment in heaven, and angelic retribution on earth – so beware!

Verse 11 "For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the 99 and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?"

If he's just a businessman - No! But if he cares for his sheep, then yes!

"And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the 99 that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

Notice in this parable - three characteristics about God's love... First, His love is **unconditional**. The shepherd never looks into why the one lost sheep went astray.

Second, it's **individual**. He leaves 99 to seek out one. If all that mattered to God was numbers He wouldn't worry about a single, lousy sheep. It's been said, "**God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love.**"

Finally, God's love is **emotional**. When the shepherd finds the sheep he doesn't scold, or flog, or skin, or turn him into lamb chops! He rejoices!

And speaking of that one lost sheep, Jesus tells us how we should restore Him to the church after he's been found.

Reconciliation is a three-fold process...

Verse 15 "**Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.**"

Here again is an area where we need to act like little children.

If Nick offends Mack – Mack doesn't wait a few days to mull the situation over. He doesn't spend time nursing a grudge, or growing bitter, or allowing barriers to develop between he and Nick. He immediately goes and confronts his brother!

Nick and Mack are brothers, and they have no qualms communicating with each other. They're not worried up ruffling feathers or upsetting each other.

If one goes off the deep end the other is there to pull him back to shore.

We too are brothers and sisters in God's family - and it's our responsibility to hold each other accountable. When we're hurt by another member of the church it's our duty to go to

that person and deal with that wound – as soon as possible.

Jesus is specific, "Go and tell him his fault between you and him".

Jesus doesn't say go tell a third party. He says specifically to go to that brother only, and settle your differences without making it an issue with anyone else.

Hopefully, he'll be receptive and reconciliation will result... "But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'" Here's the second step...

You take two or three witnesses to talk to the person who's sinned.

Again, the desire is for reconciliation, but... "If he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church." Here's step three. Bring the pressure of the whole Body on to the wayward person in an attempt to wake them up and cause them to repent.

This doesn't necessarily mean a public rebuke. This could mean a review by the leadership acting on behalf of the rest of the church. But this is the last step.

"If he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector." If the person is still unrepentant they should be removed from the church - and treated as an unbeliever... *That means loved and prayed for* – but as an outsider – not as a functioning and fellowshiping member of the church.

Over the years there have been occasions when we've taken this final step, and it's always a difficult task. Even with

excommunication, reconciliation is the goal.

And in our experience, more times than not, the person we had to bar from fellowship repented and returned – if not to our church – then to the Lord.

In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul rebukes the Corinthians for putting up with blatant sin. A man in the church was living in an incestuous relationship, and they were proud of their tolerance. Paul tells them to deal with the man and boot him from the body.

Apparently, they do... and it works. The sinner repents. When Paul writes to the church again in 2 Corinthians 2, he tells them to forgive and receive the man.

Here's the point, sin doesn't *go away* by *looking the other way*. You can't be afraid of appropriate and biblical confrontation. It's God's way to reconciliation.

Verse 18 **“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”**

In verse 18 Jesus gives to the first 12 Apostles authority to bind and loose. *Binding and loosing* are rabbinical terms. They mean to **prohibit** and **permit**.

The twelve apostles used this authority to establish faith and practice for the early church. The apostles were the rabbis of Christianity. Binding and loosing allowed them to transition the followers of Jesus from Judaism to Christianity.

When my family was much younger and we went to the water park at Lake Lanier - as a father I would have to

exercise my authority to bind and loose.

My kids were trained by Kathy and I to understand right from wrong.

At home the kids knew their boundaries and limitations - but the water park is another world. And I would have to interpret right and wrong for each of the kids.

I would start binding and loosing... *Zack, you can ride this and can go there, but stay on this side of the lake... Natalie, this is okay, but that's off-limits, and don't leave this area... Nick, get a mat, and go to the top of the slide, but wait on me... And Mack, don't leave this beach without your mom.*

In the first few minutes at the park I'd bound and loosed each of my children.

I established their limits, and laid out opportunities, based on what was right and wrong for their age, and maturity, and swimming skills. I didn't make up new rules, but adapted the rules to a new environment – this is “binding and loosing.”

Here's an example of modern day *binding* and *loosing*. Say the Gospel reaches a tribe deep in the jungles of Africa. The whole town is converted to faith in Jesus. Suddenly, the tribe goes from demon-worshipping, half-naked animists to born again Christians. And now every aspect of their lives has to be re-examined...

Do they continue to celebrate the tribe's holidays?

How do women now dress?

What kind of food, and drink, and entertainment is allowable?

When and how do they worship God?

Any time Christianity crosses cultures practical applications need to be made. Church leaders have to *bind* and *loose* based on biblical and loving principles.

The classic example of binding and loosing in the New Testament is found in Acts 15. God saved the Gentiles just as He saved the Jews – by faith, not Law.

But how could Jews and Gentiles live in harmony when Jews are so easily offended by Gentile practices? A Church council met to decide what to do.

The result was *binding and loosing*. The apostles loosed the Gentiles from 609 of the 613 Jewish Laws. But left the Gentiles bound to four Laws that prohibited behavior that horribly offended Jews. This called the Gentiles to walk in love.

Here's the point, church leaders need to step up and lead. We need to exercise the spiritual authority we're given to *establish policy* and *administer discipline*.

When the lost sheep is found we need to help him become whole and healthy.

In verse 19 Jesus encourages us to *pray as a team*. “If two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.” Hey, I have four kids, and seldom do they all agree on anything.

At times I'll give them what they want, if they'll just show a little unity.

This is Jesus' point here... Agree together - find some common ground - unite in His name and nature – and your prayer will carry an extra punch.

In sports, athletes learn to *play as a team*. One unit working in harmony is better than the sum of its parts. Likewise, Christians need to *pray as a team*.

“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” The Jews said it took 10 men for God to answer a public prayer.

This assumption was based on Abraham's prayer for Sodom. God would spare the city if Abraham could find just 10 righteous men – thus, according to the rabbis it took 10 men for God to reveal Himself. *But Jesus disagreed with the rabbis!*

All it really takes is 2 or 3 – men or women – and God promises to show up!

This is an exciting promise. There are big name pastors and musicians that won't come to an event unless you guaranteed minimum number of people.

Praise the Lord Jesus has no minimums. All it takes is two or three!

In verse 21 Peter asks if it's enough to forgive your brother seven times.

“Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Peter thought this was generous. The rabbis taught you had to forgive someone 2, even 3 times.

Peter thought “seven times” was extremely merciful... But in verse 22 Jesus tells him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”

That doesn't mean you count 490 times - then punch the guy out. Jesus is communicating that *if you're keeping count you're missing the point.*

God has put no limits on how often He'll forgive us if we're truly repentant. Likewise, don't limit your willingness to forgive people who sin against you.

Jesus uses a parable to illustrate the lesson.

Verse 23 “Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.” Literally, \$10,000,000

“But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made.

The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' "Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.”

Incredible, the master of the house just writes off \$10 million.

This is outlandish, extravagant forgiveness. According to commentator William Barclay the total revenue of the entire province of Judea was 600 talents.

The master of the house is forgiving his servant of a king's ransom.

“But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii;” A denarius equaled 20 cents. Thus 100 denarii equals 20 bucks.

Jesus is laying out as stark a contrast as possible. 100 denarii could be carried in a man's pocket. To transport 10,000 talents took an army of 8600 men traveling with a 60 pound bag of coins over their shoulder. The difference was staggering.

“And he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' The guy who's just been forgiven \$10,000,000 is going ballistic over \$20.

"So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him (remember, all he owed was \$20), saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' "And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.

So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done.” They rat him out.

“Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant!

I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?'

"And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My

heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

The point of the parable is obvious! God's forgiveness is so lavish - He knows we can never pay Him back. *God's grace cost the blood of His Son*. All He asks is that we forgive others with the same generosity with which we've been forgiven.

And we're to forgive "from our heart." Have you ever apologized to someone who mumbled, "Well, I guess I'll forgive you..." But you weren't sure they did.

Real forgiveness, God's forgiveness, always comes from the heart.

Chapter 19, "Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, that He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan."

"And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there.

The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him..." Note the contrast, Jesus is all about healing people - the Pharisees want to stir up trouble. They want to argue.

The Pharisees should've wanted to *celebrate* – instead they come to *debate*.

And they've even picked out their subject. It was a controversial subject 2000 years ago, and it remains so today... Divorce... Verse 3, "And saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?"

Notice this phrase, "for just any reason?" Those words

reveal the Pharisees were trying to draw Jesus into a theological debate that was raging at the time.

The debate centered on a single passage and a single word in that passage.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 stipulated that when a man divorced his wife for “**some uncleanness**” it was his duty to write a certificate of divorce, and send her away.

The rabbis debated the definition of “**uncleanness**”. And there were two schools of thought. One led by a rabbi named Hillel, and the other by a Rabbi Shammai...

Rabbi Hillel had a very liberal interpretation. Anything constituted uncleanness.

Burn your husband’s dinner – put too much salt on his food - appear in public with your head uncovered – talk to another man on the street – show disrespect toward your husband’s parents – practically any infraction could be uncleanness.

A rabbi named Akiba went so far as to say that if a husband found a woman more beautiful than his wife he could consider her unclean and justify a divorce.

The Pharisees who came to Jesus were asking Him if He agreed with Rabbi Hillel, “**Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?**”

The other school of thought limited “**uncleanness**” to sexual promiscuity.

According to Jewish Law, promiscuity that went as far as adultery was punished by death – not divorce. Stoning was

the penalty for adultery. So according to Rabbi Shammai an "uncleanness" that resulted in divorce was for a sexual indiscretion that stopped short of adultery... *immodesty, a flirtatious nature, an indecency...*

These Pharisees are trying to get Jesus embroiled in their debate.

Verse 4 "And (Jesus) answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh.

Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

Jesus surprises them. Before He interprets Deuteronomy He goes to Genesis.

He shows that God never intended for divorce to occur. God's ideal was for one man and one woman to live together for a lifetime in a loving and committed union.

Malachi 2 says it clearly, "The Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce."

I like Sylvester Stallone's quote. After all the Rocky movies he said this about boxing, "It's is great exercise, as long as you can yell 'cut' whenever you want."

Sadly, that's many people's attitude toward marriage.

For many people today marriage is a revolving door.

The phrase, "until death do us part," has been substituted

with the words, "until something better comes along," or "until it gets hard," or "until I'm no longer happy."

Married couples need to remember a wedding is an event, but a marriage is an achievement. A good marriage doesn't just happen... It requires *sacrifice and giving - hard work and effort - unselfish commitment and a forgiving attitude.*

Jesus is saying, God intends for marriage to last for a lifetime!

Now the Pharisees fire back. "They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" If God is not in favor of divorce why did the Mosaic Law make allowance for it?

"(Jesus) said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."

Jesus is saying the Jewish Laws concerning divorce were not *an expression of God's will*, as much as they were a *concession to human willfulness.*

Deuteronomy 24 was a concession to hard hearts and stubbornness.

When the hostility in the marriage became so intense, that the choice was between killing each other and getting divorced - Moses permitted divorce.

The Law in Deuteronomy was not *a commandment*, but a *concession.*

Here's where both schools were in error...

Just because God *allows* divorce doesn't mean He *approves*. In fact, the stipulations on divorce in the Law were intended to discourage divorce.

Before Deuteronomy a man could divorce his wife by simply saying, "**You are no longer my wife!**" A single statement and she's on the street.

The Law made divorce more difficult by regulating its practice.

The Law of Moses, Deuteronomy 24, changed divorce in three ways.

First, it established **an official legal procedure**. You had to write a certificate.

Second, the legal procedure necessitated "**a cooling-off period.**" To obtain a certificate you had to seek out a scribe and pay a substantial fee. It was a deterrent... It required time and provided an opportunity to reconsider.

Third, a man who divorced his wife **could never remarry her** - even if she later became a widow. There were no rewinds. A rash divorce couldn't be rectified.

Deuteronomy 24 was to *postpone* not *condone* divorce - *prevent* not *permit*.

Verse 9 "**And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.**" Here Jesus raises the bar.

Couples in the Old Testament didn't have the power of God's Spirit to help resolve conflicts – thus, God made a concession. But we have no excuse.

A Christian should never have a hard heart. We've been softened by God's grace. Our hearts have been tenderized by grace. The Holy Spirit lives in us.

As far as Jesus is concerned in verse 9 the only legitimate allowance for divorce and remarry among His followers is “**sexual immorality.**”

The Greek word is “**pornea**” from which we get our term pornography.

It's a general term used for all forms of illicit sexual activity from adultery to homosexuality. Sexual sin is a God-approved reason to divorce a spouse.

Under the Jewish Law the penalty for adultery was death by stoning.

Thus, if your spouse committed adultery you would be a widow or widower, and a candidate for remarriage. Here Jesus reaffirms an offended party's option to remarry, while at the same time, showing mercy on the guilty party.

Keep in mind, this doesn't mean you have to divorce an adulterous spouse. With God's grace even damage done by adultery can be repaired. But if your spouse has been unfaithful sexually divorce is a legitimate option.

The one other biblical justification for divorce and remarriage – *abandonment* - is found in 1 Corinthians 7. Paul says if an unbeliever abandons a believing mate the believer is under no bondage, and is free to move on with his or her life.

This means if you've been divorced for any reason other

than sexual immorality or abandonment – and have remarried – you are living in adultery. Incompatibility, irreconcilable differences, we decided to be friends - are not biblical justifications.

And does this mean God can't bless your current marriage?
Absolutely not!

But here's what you have to do - treat your sin as you would any other sin - confess it, repent, ask for God's forgiveness – embrace His perspective on marriage and divorce, and conduct your current marriage in a godly way.

Hey, you can't start over in a healthy marriage, until you put a period on the former marriage. A lot of couples want to use a comma, and carry over old attitudes. You have to put down a period to start a new sentence.

Divorce is not the unpardonable sin. The blood of Jesus cleanses all sin. **God hates divorce, but loves divorcees.** God gives *new starts to repentant hearts.*

Jesus had just upped the expectations for marriage. And His disciples respond in verse 10. **"If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry."**

They're not sure they can live up! *And without the Holy Spirit they can't!*

Hey, I believe God invented marriage – with its high demands and rewards - to constantly remind us of our selfishness and keep us totally dependant upon Him.

Jesus said in verse 11, **"All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs**

who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake.

He who is able to accept it, let him accept it." Marriage isn't for everyone.

I'll never forget the Sunday morning when an older fellow – with a woman at his side - introduce himself to me. He said, "Hello, I'm John Smith, eunuch of the Most High God." Then he rattled off a few verses. I didn't even hear them. He caught me by surprise. I turned to the woman with him, and said, "*I suppose you're his sister.*"

It was weird. This is why Jesus said, "**He who is able to accept it, let him accept it.**" Apparently, I'm not able. Not everyone will be wedded to the idea of singleness.

Notice, Jesus mentions three types of eunuchs.

First, are **eunuchs by birth**. These are not homosexuals. Jesus is talking about men with a normal sex drive, but with a low sex drive - low libido.

Second, are **men who become eunuchs**. In the ancient Orient, males serving in the court of the King were castrated to prevent any hanky-panky with the royal harem. It's possible the prophet Daniel was made a eunuch in Babylon.

Third, are those who **become eunuchs for the kingdom of God**. These are people who forego marriage to devote themselves unreservedly to God's work.

Paul was an example of a eunuch for the Kingdom. He

remained single to be more singly devoted to Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 7 he writes, "He who is unmarried cares for the things that belong to the Lord - how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world - how he may please his wife."

If I wasn't married I wouldn't have to buy gas for two cars, or pay for make-up, or spend money on anniversaries. I could use the surplus to serve the Lord.

On the other hand, I couldn't cuddle up with the most wonderful woman in the world... I'll take marriage, but God has called some to be single for His sake.

"Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them." The disciples thought Jesus was too busy to be bothered by little kids. The Master had more important matters.

"But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus loved children. George McDonald said he doubted a man's Christianity if children didn't play around his front door.

Years ago a Gallup survey showed 19 out of 20 Christians committed their lives to Jesus before age 25. At 25, 1 in 10,000 people become Christians. At 35 it's 1 in 50,000. At 45 it's 1 in 200,000. At 55 it's 1 in 300,000. At 75 it's 1 in 700,000.

The point of the poll is that if we don't reach people while they're young the chances of reaching them become less and less the older they become.

Verse 15 “And (Jesus) laid His hands on them and departed from there...”

Men, kids don't just need a mother's touch. They also need daddy hugs.

They need healthy, proper masculine touch. Dads pick up your kids. Cuddle, wrestle, and tuck your kids into bed. Kids need the security of strong arms.