

Matthew 21-08-22a

Good morning, this is the 22nd day of August 2021, and we continue our study in the Gospel of Matthew at chapter 18, with some significant time about to be spent in 1 Corinthians chapter 7. Matthew chapter 18 and 1 Corinthians chapter 7. Everyone's favorite subject, marriage. How to get into it, how to get out of it, how to avoid it, how to survive it, it's all here. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and we will begin.

Father, we are grateful for another opportunity to spend this time together looking at your word and the things that the Lord Jesus taught during his earthly ministry, the truth that is supernatural in its power to transform us, to enable us, to equip us, so that we can live a life that has meaning and purpose now and prepares us for the future. We pray that your Holy Spirit will illuminate and interpret for us, help us to understand what is said and how it applies to our individual lives. We pray that as a result, we will be drawn closer to you and closer to each other.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we had quite the study last time in looking at the 19th chapter via the 18th chapter of Matthew, 18 and 19 in Matthew.

I've stepped back one more time to emphasize again how important it is to put Jesus' words about marriage and divorce in the 18th chapter. It's going to come full circle from the greatness question that began chapter 18, and that is a new section. You remember Peter finds the coin in the fish's mouth.

Actually, that story is not told. Jesus just tells him what to do, and that story ends. It's really peculiar.

Human authors would never do it that way. It would be told in reverse. Peter would go fish and find a coin in the mouth and bring it back.

Jesus would say, well, yes, that's for the tax. But instead, the tax collectors have that discourse. Jesus tells Peter, so that we do not cause them to stumble, go do this.

And then we're not told. We're not told that it happens. You occasionally have a plot thread in a movie or a novel that you're reading, and maybe the author forgot to ever pick that up.

Somebody disappears, and they don't return. Someone is left with their little story arc uncompleted. It's like that thread got missed when the bobbin thread came up.

You don't quite know what happened. Often in Scripture, so that we don't miss the point, the story isn't told in a normal way. Chapter 17 ends very oddly because Jesus gives Peter instructions.

We're not even told that he did it. I'm sure that he did, but it is the principle that Jesus taught that provides that turning point then into chapter 18. At that time, the disciples came to Jesus saying, who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven? You go to the parallel accounts.

They were disputing among themselves who is the greatest. Jesus says, unless you are converted and become as little children, unless your mind changes and you have the humility and the receptivity of a child. I wanted to read you something that I read on this point talking about children.

There's a lot of things you can say about children, a lot of things you can say about children, but this is the comment made by a man named Pank, P-A-N-K. As the flower in the garden stretches toward the light of the sun, so there is in the child a mysterious inclination toward the eternal light. Have you never noticed this mysterious thing that when you tell the smallest child about God, it never asks with strangeness and wonder, what or who is God? I've never seen him, but they listen with shining face to the words as though they were soft, loving sounds from the land of home.

Or when you teach a child to fold its hands in prayer, it does this as though it were a matter of course, as though there were opening for it that world, which had been dreaming with longing and anticipation. Or you tell these little ones the stories of the Savior, show them the pictures with scenes and personages of the Bible, how their eyes shine, how their hearts beat. Further down, a man named Bengal said that if the kingdom is represented by these children, of such is the kingdom of heaven.

We'll see that this morning. They are the model examples of the whole class. And you remember, this was our approach in chapter 18, that these children represent a class of believers, those who are humble, those who are teachable, those who are amenable and are seeking to live their lives in a way to please God in humility.

They are the model examples of the whole class. If we want to know the character of the class, we must study the children. If we want insight into how we should think and behave, look at the children.

It is their receptivity to which Jesus refers. In them, sin has not yet developed so as to produce conscious resistance to the power of divine grace. It doesn't mean that they're sinless, but that sin hasn't developed into a pattern and into a power that produces conscious resistance to God's grace.

Once that occurs, we need the convicting power of law. When we begin to push back in sin as we mature, that's why the law was added. The law was added because of transgressions.

By the law comes the knowledge of sin. It's not hard to demonstrate to a child that they

have done wrong. It's not always easy to get them to stop doing wrong, but they have a pretty good sense that they have transgressed.

So, in children, I'm going to say this again, sin has not yet developed so as to produce conscious resistance to the power of divine grace, which necessitates the convicting power of the law. What children are in their condition of infancy, ready and willing to accept the gift of grace, adults must become by the operation of the Spirit and the Word. The moment this receptiveness is produced in us, regeneration and justification follow and we too are saved.

Talking about the point of salvation, this was our starting point. That was the starting point. Remember, starting with the humility and the receptivity of children, then it was those who create difficulties for children.

Woe to him who brings those offenses, who causes children to stumble. Then those who are caused to scatter and have to be found. Then the division that inevitably follows from that breach, scattering or stumbling, dealing with a sinning brother.

Then unforgiveness, the unforgiving servant, not being willing to look at what has been done for us and do the same for each other. All of these centering on humility, driving toward the higher purpose and the higher goal of God's kingdom, our future participation and entrance into it, and our united effort to move in that direction now. So then when we came to marriage and divorce, this is another kind of division.

It is another type of unity that can be broken up by self-centeredness, by self-interest, by lack of sensitivity, lack of all of the things that Jesus emphasized in chapter 18 and Jesus' great discouragement about breaking up marriages. Whoever divorces his wife except for fornication and marries another commits adultery. Whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.

His disciples say, well, if that's the case, then it's better not to marry. And then Jesus said, not everyone has room for this saying. And then he talks about eunuchs and the three ways in which people are not devoted to a marriage in the normal sense.

There are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb. 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.

Sometimes in the course of nature, we find ourselves unmarried, unable to marry in the natural course of the world from the womb. It just doesn't seem to be in the cards. I don't believe that there's a gift of celibacy.

I think that God has a plan for everyone's life. And sometimes it includes marriage. Sometimes it doesn't.

I've known several individuals who went all the way through life and were never married. I had an aunt who was never married. I have a boss who was never married.

Does it make them strange, weird, odd, or given some sort of exceptional calling? The apostle Paul was not married. There are those who in the natural course of life, it doesn't come about. It isn't that circumstance, just like it isn't any other circumstance that defines us.

It is what we do in those circumstances. You can take advantage of things that are seemingly a deficit and turn them into a positive. There are people who snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, and there are others who do the opposite.

There are times when we turn a loss into an advantage. If you play chess, it's the principle of a gambit. You can sacrifice a piece, and it looks like a setback.

It looks like a loss, but you gain a tactical advantage, and you can actually win the game by sacrificing your queen. If your opponent is so material hungry that they just want to kill that queen or that rook and remove several points off the board, they leave themselves open to an attack from which they cannot recover. So sometimes a loss can be a gain.

A lack can be a tactical advantage, and God works all things together for good. As with every circumstance in our life, we can have financial losses. We can have social losses.

We can have employment difficulties. We can be relocated. We can have changes in our family situation, changes in our marriage situation.

There are all kinds of things that go into making up the circumstance that defines a day that we wake up into, that we navigate, and that we collapse in a heap at the end of. But it is what we do with the hand that we are dealt, as it were. And in some cases, nature itself, it's like being a eunuch from the womb.

That possibility isn't open for some people to just meet somebody, fall madly in love, and get married. For some people, it's not a part of the natural course. His second example is there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, sometimes would have loved to be married.

And I could tell you stories, I'm sure you've heard stories of people who got engaged, and then their fiancé or fiancée died tragically just shortly before the marriage, or tragically changed their mind and left and orphaned the person that was ready to be married to them for the rest of their life. They left them standing at the altar, as it were, or shortly beforehand. There are famous stories in this case.

You read the biography of Lottie Moon. She fell madly in love with a guy, and it looked like they were going to get married. And then he took a turn for the worse, and she

remained unmarried for the rest of her life.

But she was a very fruitful missionary to China. So God can work things together for good. But sometimes it's somebody else's fault that someone is not married or is not a part of a unified group.

Eunuch, that means you're, you know, specifically Jesus is talking here about marriage, but he's putting marriage for unity in general. And there are some times that the group can be small to non-existent, and sometimes it's other people's fault. Others have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake.

In the first two cases, you notice it's not your choice. You don't choose for nature to take the course that it takes. A eunuch that is born such wouldn't necessarily have chosen that.

If it's the choices made by others that define a situation, you have no control over that. You just work with what you're given. Sometimes you've got to make bricks without straw.

But the third case Jesus emphasizes, because this is a conscious choice, there is an option that is willingly set aside. I think the Apostle Paul is probably a case of this. The Lord Jesus himself is a case of this.

People just often, unless you're a conspiracy theorist and, you know, the Da Vinci Code or something, most people don't stop and think about the fact that Jesus was not married and did not marry. Why didn't he marry? It's not hard to answer that question. You can only imagine just the fantasies of him having offspring or having someone with whom he cohabited.

It just raises all kinds of complications. But in essence, Jesus was devoted to the plan and purpose of the Father and carrying it out, as was the Apostle Paul. As should all of us be.

And Jesus' point here, if you remember from last time, is it is about our self-discipline, about our spiritual priorities and about our goals. Why do we do what we do? It's easy to do what we do because our family life defines us, our marriage defines us. A lot of times wives primarily do what they do because they're supporting their husband and supporting the household.

In this day and age, you can have the reverse. A woman can be working and a man can be managing the household. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with that.

The Bible does not say, women thou shalt not work or man thou shalt not keep house. It isn't the nature of what we do. It is why we do it.

Why do we do what we do? For this, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 7. Paul is going to pick

up this theme. And in 1 Corinthians 7, he says, now concerning the things of which you wrote to me. So there were questions that were sent via a document.

And so Paul has worked his way down to this question that they say, there's this comment and I think Paul may have made it in person or he may have been quoted as saying this. So concerning the things of which you wrote to me, good for a man not to touch a woman. This is the topic.

He's not stating this as a fact. This is the topic in the letter. This is the issue.

You could almost put this as a question. Is it really good for a man not to touch a woman? I've heard this said, some people believe this. I think Paul, maybe you said something that was construed this way.

Please elaborate. You know, we're all going to die out if a man does not touch a woman. The first generation of the church will be the last generation of the church.

So good for a man not to touch a woman. Basically, he says there is merit in that idea. Nevertheless, because of fornication, very same reason for breaking up a marriage that Jesus cited because of fornication, let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband.

The first defining principle when it comes to thinking about marriage and about entering into a marriage, sustaining a marriage, exiting a marriage, is one thing we all know for sure, fornication is a bad thing. Breaking faith, breaking covenant, doing what is despicable, that's off the table. Nothing we do should end up being fornication.

And fornication is not just sexual immorality, it is the breach, the harm that it does to others. Depending on who these actions are performed with, who are they committed with, you can be harming someone's spouse, you can be harming someone's future spouse, you can be harming that person by messing up their receptors and their ability to discern what is good, you can erode their moral sensibility, you can twist around their moral compass. People in religious leadership have done this.

They have, you know, ensnared young women and even older women in churches under the guise of counseling or leadership or comfort or it starts out as one thing and turns into something else. It's all fornication. It is breach of trust, breaking faith, messing up a promise, a covenant.

So because of fornication, that's why marriages should stay together, that's why people need to get married. If by being single they are going to drift around and cause fornication situations, then they should find a husband or wife and get married. Let the husband render to his wife the affection to her and likewise also the wife to her husband.

This is wife and husband. Notice it doesn't say let a man pick a woman and render

affection, let a woman pick a man and render affection. This is husband and wife.

There is a commitment, there is a covenant involved. Doesn't matter how this was achieved, who was involved. Marriage customs have varied greatly.

What we do know biblically is it's one man, one woman, and they make a commitment that is permanent. Hence all of the traditional pieces of our wedding ceremonies. Let the husband render to his wife the affection that is due her.

Now, what affection is due to the wife? Let the wife render the affection that is due to her husband. Think about that for a minute. What is due? Well, like so many things, it depends.

What affection is due? In a wonderful, loving, rapturous, romantic, I love you to the depth of my soul marriage, there is any amount of affection that is due and is reciprocal. This is supposed to be reciprocal, right? The husband renders what is due to the wife, the wife renders what is due to the husband. What if it's not? What if because of the hardness of hearts, what if there is pornography on one side or the other? What if there is abuse on one side or the other? What if there is malfeasance on one side? If a husband is faithless, if he breaches trust, if he is abusive, if he is destructive, how much affection is due him? Blowing through the passage, we don't always stop and look at the words.

Paul doesn't say, let the husband render affection to the wife, does he? He doesn't say, let the wife render affection to the husband. Extra little concept in there. You have to figure out what is due.

I would submit that an abusive, physically abusive, mentally abusive, morally abusive, spiritually abusive husband isn't due any affection at all from his wife. He's broken faith and he's broken trust. In the same way, how much should you listen to a pastor who has broken faith and betrayed the trust of people in the church, women in the church, broken faith with his wife and has messed around I mention this because it is so commonplace.

You can hardly swing a cat without hitting somebody that can tell you a story about youth pastor, assistant pastor, senior pastor, somebody in leadership in a church, the music minister, running off with some gal in the church and and wreaking great havoc and harm to the group as a result. It is so selfish. It is so unbiblical, short-sighted.

It is a breach of trust, breaking faith, abusing the opportunity to do something positive in the exercise of gifts for the benefit of the body and instead you become a source of division, strife, contention and destruction. That person isn't due affection. Abuse and disunion, faithlessness, someone who is constantly dragging us away from the path to the narrow gate isn't due affection.

Render the affection that is due. Figuring out what is due is a separate question. The wife does not have authority over her own body but the husband and likewise the

husband does not have authority over his own body but the wife.

Now what is this saying? Well, I'm your slave. Whatever you say goes. Think about what Paul says here.

In a healthy relationship where these are godly individuals who are striving to enter by the narrow gate and are wanting to help each other, this is the positive case that Paul is talking about. That there is affection due. That this is a healthy union.

It is a healthy cohabitation. And when it is healthy, this is Philippians chapter 2, the mind should be in the husband and wife that was in Christ Jesus who did not look out for his own interests but also for the interests of others. That's the definition of the mind of Christ in Philippians 2. Each one look out not only for his own interests which we are to do, we have to look out for ourselves but also for the interests of others.

In that context in a healthy marriage where there is affection due from the wife to the husband and there is affection due from the husband to the wife, the partner can express what the other partner's body can do for them. That's what he says. The wife doesn't have authority over her own body and this is her view.

I am here and I want to please my husband. The husband says I am here, I've got a body and I want to please my wife. If she is uncomfortable with a thing, we're not going to do that.

If he is uncomfortable with a thing, we're not going to do that. I'm not going to say, look, I'm the husband, I want gratification, you will submit and exercise authority over the wife's body. The husband is not to do that.

The husband is to be sensitive to the needs of the wife. The wife is to be sensitive to the needs of the husband and they hand each other that authority. This is a part of love to grant that interest.

Let's do what is in your interest. Something is harmful, something is scary, something is physically uncomfortable, something is mentally because of history, because of who knows what. There's all kinds of things, but this is essentially saying what Philippians chapter two says.

Look out for the interest of the other over yourself. This is not an opportunity for self-gratification, this is an opportunity for partner gratification. You look at them as having the authority on what is done, when it is done, how often it is done, and so on.

Does that make sense? The wife does not have authority over her own body, the husband does. This is her submission. She wants to do what is pleasing to him, but it has to be reciprocal.

This is not a one-way thing. If one person is not reciprocating, that's a whole different situation. And if pornography enters in, and listen, there can be pornography in a marriage between a husband and wife.

If there is insensitivity, if there is not that reciprocal granting of authority to the other, and selfishness and self-centeredness enters in, and you know, boorish, you know, I want what I want and I don't care what happens as a result, that's pornography. That is a breach of trust. It is a breaking of faith and a breaking of promise, and that is grounds for taking action.

This is the ideal. Let the husband render affection that is due. Let the wife render the affection that is due, granting each other the authority in the realm of primarily, he's talking here about the physical relationship, but as with everything in Scripture, this speaks, this is representative.

Children are representative of the humble seekers who are pressing toward the kingdom of God, right? The husband and wife here, their physical relationship is emblematic of their entire relationship. In every area, there should be looking out for the interest. I might want to do this thing, but I'm not going to.

I might want to go fishing with my buddies. I might want to take a night on the town, but my wife has say, and I think she would prefer if I was at home with her, or if we went out together and did something instead of me and the old gang going out. The wife might say, well, there are things I might want to do, but I think that might leave my husband twisting in the wind.

And so this granting of authority, yes, primarily at first blush, this is talking about the physical side of marital relationship, but it is put for, it is metaphorical of this attitude of looking out for the interest of the spouse. There's nobody that should be more of a protagonist and more of a supporter and more of a fan and an advocate for a wife than a husband. There's nobody that should be more of a backer and more of an enthusiastic looking out for taking care of in every way they can think of.

Spouses should be thinking about each other. Who's going to be a better friend? Who's going to be a better support? Who's going to be more able to know exactly what is needed and when it is needed than the person with whom you have become one flesh. This is going back to the one flesh idea.

The man leaves his family. The woman leaves her father's house. They are united together and the two become one flesh.

What man ever yet hated his own flesh? He takes care of it. I've gotten to where I wear gloves now before I do any kind of work. It used to be it didn't matter.

Now it matters. You will hardly see me doing anything more than maybe turning a

screwdriver without putting on gloves because I've got to take care of my hands. I make my living with them when they get abused and cut up and such.

That's a bad thing. So I look out for them. I'm really careful about hearing protection.

Piano tuner kind of needs to be able to hear. I'm really careful about eye protection, much more so than when I was young because you're smarter the older you get for one thing. But we look out for our body.

You're going to be laying flooring. You get some kind of thing to kneel on that doesn't leave your knees all bruised and scratched and such. We look out for our body.

We try not to eat things that mess us up. You've got a food sensitivity. You've got an allergy.

You've got something that always surprises your digestion in unhappy ways. You don't eat that. You avoid it.

You watch out for it. We take care of our body. Well, this is the kind of proactive thinking about and looking for ways to support the spouse.

That's the idea here. People come to this and just say it's about physical intimacy. Yes.

And Jesus was talking about children when he put one in his lap and when he caught them up in his arms. But it's much more than that. And if you stop there, you've really missed the larger point.

This is about unity. Unity starting all the way back at the beginning of chapter 18. And this is proactive steps.

This is looking for ways to be helpful, supportive, affectionate. Affection is when you have affection for somebody and their birthday comes around, what do you do? You send them a card, send them a gift, call them on the phone, send them a little text, give them a little happy animated birthday wish. Why? It's an expression of affection.

And it's spontaneous. It's proactive. You probably got a reminder off of your digital device somewhere.

Oh, so-and-so's birthday coming up in two days. And then we say, well, I want to express. Isn't this what we want to do first and foremost to the Lord God in heaven when we think about him and what he has done for us, rescuing us out of the miry clay, setting us on solid rock, cleansing us from our sins, giving us the opportunity to have a life of meaning and purpose, giving us hope for the future and a wonderful expectation.

When you think about God the Father, when you think about the Lord Jesus, when you think about the Holy Spirit and his patient dwelling with us through our ups and downs,

our thicks and our sins, when you think about God the Father, when you think about the Lord Jesus, when you think I thank God the Father for the Holy Spirit. He's silent. He doesn't get to speak up for himself.

That's his role. Is he able to speak? Could God the Holy Spirit do everything God the Father and God the Son can do? Absolutely. Is he probably the most, except in Pentecostal circles, maybe the most unappreciated member of the Trinity? We pray to God the Father.

We love the Lord Jesus and we see him evident, but God the Holy Spirit made Jesus' earthly life and death and resurrection possible. Without the Holy Spirit, there is no resurrection, no resurrection without the Holy Spirit. The Spirit that raised Christ Jesus from the dead is going to give life to our mortal bodies when we are raised or translated.

The Holy Spirit's going to do that. It's not the Father and it's not the Son. They're involved.

It's their plan and there's means and provision made, a basis so that it can be done. But God the Holy Spirit is going to raise us. Well, when you think of a person for whom you have affection, you want to express that.

It's natural. It's healthy. It's a good thing to express affection.

That's what this is talking about. When you want to make a confection, some kind of a baked good for someone on their birthday, what's the next thing you think of? It's their birthday. I want to make them a cake.

Oh wait, they don't like cake. Maybe they want a pie. Oh, maybe they don't eat pie.

I'll make them sugar-free, gluten-free, grain-free, you know. But what do you do? You don't say, I like chocolate cake. I'm making a chocolate cake.

I'm slathering Dutch chocolate frosting all over that thing. It's your birthday, but I'm making the cake. I'm making the kind of cake I like.

Think about this now. This is my illustration. I'm back in my verse.

The wife does not have authority over her own body. The baker does not have authority over the cake. It's the person you're making it for.

You're feeding into and reading into and efforting into that person. They're the one that chooses the cake because that's who you're making it for. This is what Paul is talking about.

Authority over the body. This isn't what a lot of people have tried to make it. It's for definition, for direction, for degree and extent, and all the rest of the things that go into

marriage, whether it's physical intimacy or all the rest of it, the husband is to look to the wife.

She's got authority over what he does and vice versa. That's the idea. Just think about making a cake.

You're going to make the cake you like, or you're going to make the cake the person you're making it for likes. They have the authority. You do it willingly and enthusiastically.

You want them to be pleased. When you've got little kids and they want a choo-choo train, you will scour the earth trying to find the train. You remember there's a movie about Arnold Schwarzenegger trying to find a toy and it was the last one in the city.

Antics ensue, him trying to secure this toy because the child had authority over the gift. And you've got Arnie out there trying to make sure it happens. That's the idea.

Well, we're going to pause here and take our break, but you can see the unity theme. You can see the humility theme that is shared in the words of the Lord Jesus and the words of the Apostle Paul. And this applies not only inside marriage, but inside any relationships between believers.

We don't look out for our own interests exclusively, but we look out for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you because that's the mind that was in Christ Jesus. Well, pause here and take our break.

When we come back, there's quite a bit more here in chapter seven that we need to take a look at.