

19:1-9 There is a clearly intended chiasmus developed in this part of Matthew, and whilst chiasmus is a typical way of simply ordering material, it also helps us with interpretation. According to the following pattern, the section about divorce [D1 in the outline below] is to be paralleled with the Lord's teaching about not despising little ones and not dividing the body of Christ by unforgiveness [D in the outline]. The body of Christ is Divinely joined together and to refuse to accept its members is to do despite to God's most holy intentions. The teaching against divorce is therefore addressing the same principles. It's a cruel paradox that so many have been so intolerant of divorce based upon this section that they have broken the principles concerning it which are the basis of the parallel section in 18:10-14 about unity and not despising little ones. So what is wrong with divorce is therefore what is wrong with the behaviour criticized in 18:10-14- a despising of others and refusing to view their significance in God's sight, because of our own self-righteousness and self-obsession; a lack of forgiveness and failing to perceive the significance of human relationships before God. Thus to divorce your partner becomes parallel with not accepting your brother / the "little ones".

"A. 17:24–27: Giving freely; money; sacrifice

Challenge

"Parable" (Who should pay taxes anyway?)

B. 18:1–7: Little children are the essence of the kingdom of heaven

C. 18:8–9: Sacrifice of the body for the sake of the kingdom

D. 18:10–14: Do not despise what God values

Parable (Lost sheep)

E. 18:15–17: What to do when a brother sins

F. 18:18–20: Agreement between heaven and earth

E1. 18:21–35: What to do when a brother sins

Parable (Unforgiving servant)

D1. 19:1–9: Do not separate what God has joined

C1. 19:10–12: Sacrifice of the body for the kingdom of heaven

B1. 19:13–15: Little children are the essence of the kingdom of heaven

A1. 19:16–20:16: Giving freely; money; sacrifice".

19:1 *When Jesus had finished these sayings*- The same phrase is used in 26:1, as if Matthew sensed how the Lord was teaching them in a very structured way, delivering content and then moving on to somewhere or something else as soon as it had been delivered.

*He departed from Galilee*- The significance is that this was the beginning of His journey to Jerusalem and death. The teaching throughout Matthew 18 is profound, He teaches the need for absolute and unconditional forgiveness and perception that our sins are the colossal 10,000 talent debt, making all sin and failure against us thereby seem minimal. And if we ‘don’t get it’, then condemnation awaits us at the last day. And on that note, He finishes the instruction of the twelve and begins His journey to die at Jerusalem. The departure coming straight after His most challenging and profound teaching serves to highlight the importance of it, as if this is the crescendo of His message to His followers.

19:2 *Healed them there*- The emphasis is upon the location of these mass healings- “there”, in Judea “beyond Jordan” (:1), a semi-Gentile area. The suggestion grows stronger and stronger that the future of His work is with the Gentiles.

19:3 *Came unto Him*- Presumably “there”, beyond Jordan. They had maybe heard that He was there because of the rumours of great miracles, and yet they made the effort to go to Him there with their legalistic questions. Their petty legalism contrasts sharply with the wonder of His teaching and extent of His miracles. They tagged along with the crowds, for they “also” came unto Him.

*Testing Him*- Another hint that the source of ‘testing’ in the wilderness which returned to the Lord later in His ministry was from the Jewish satan / adversary.

*To put away his wife*- According to the chiasmic structure of this section [see above], this teaching about divorce is parallel with the Lord’s teaching about not despising little ones but rather unconditionally forgiving them (see notes on chapter 18). It cannot therefore be accidental that there is a word play in the usage of the word *apoluo*, to “put away”, because the word is also used concerning forgiveness, the sending away of the sin of another, and releasing them from debt to us. The word has just been used in 18:27, where the gracious Lord “loosed” the wicked servant from his huge debt without repentance. And so the question here is whether a man could

put away / forgive / release his wife “for every cause”. In a sense, the man was indeed to release / forgive his wife for every cause, for everything. But of course the Pharisees had in view the sense of sending away in divorce, and not forgiveness. The Lord surely means them to understand that they should send her away- in forgiveness.

*For every cause-* The standard interpretation is that the Pharisees were seeking to draw the Lord into taking a position behind either the school of Hillel (that a man might divorce his wife for any reason) or that of Shammai (divorce was allowable only for unfaithfulness). The Hillel school had justified Herod Antipas recent marriage on this basis, and he was likely to crack down on anyone teaching otherwise- this was obviously one reason they sought to lead the Lord into this whole minefield. But if so, the question arises as to why they should raise this issue with Him so apparently ‘out of the blue’. If the question was simply as to which rabbinic school the Lord supported on this issue, then it would seem that He quite clearly came down on the side of Shammai- ‘for unfaithfulness’ (:9). But whenever the Lord was given such questions, He always avoided giving such direct answers but rather elevated the issues to a much higher and yet more essential level. I suggest that what they found so shocking was His teaching about unconditional forgiveness regardless of the sincerity of repentance, and so they came to Him with the case of adultery in marriage- where surely, so they thought, there could be no forgiveness for adultery and in fact Moses commanded that a man divorce his wife in this case. Whichever rabbinic school the Lord supported, He would surely have to admit that there were some sins which could not just be forgiven but must be acted upon in terms of divorce and exclusion from the marriage. Their use of *apoluo*, to “put away”, was therefore a conscious allusion to the Lord’s usage of the word in 18:27, where the gracious Lord “loosed” [s.w.] the wicked servant from his huge debt without repentance. So I would read the Pharisees here as implying: ‘You claim a man must forgive his brother anything without checking out his repentance; but OK, can a man really forgive his *wife* “every cause”? And Moses surely did sanction divorce for some reasons, whether you go with Hillel [‘every or any cause’] or Shammai [for adultery]’. In terms of connection with the Lord’s previous teaching, the Lord had taught that if someone sins against you, i.e. a personal offence, then you can drag them through the synagogue discipline system [“tell it to the *ekklesia* / assembled meeting”]- although the higher level was unconditional forgiveness. For many listeners and readers, that teaching begs the very same question: “OK, so far so good, Jesus... but really, literally, for every cause, in every case...?”. The Pharisees are asking this question, assuming that they have the Lord trapped because Moses teaches divorce for some things. Of course, Moses doesn’t ‘teach divorce’- there was a higher level. If your wife sinned against you, you could do as Hosea did, and simply forgive her, rather than making use of Mosaic concessions. Hence the Lord’s answer is basically that any verses in the Law which might appear to teach divorce are in fact concessions to human weakness and not the ideal standard.

19:4 *Have you not read?*- The Lord is addressing the literate Pharisees, rather than the illiterate crowds who *heard* rather than *read*. His implication is that He wondered whether they had even read the opening passages of the Torah, which describe the creation of Adam and Eve. They had of course read them, but the Lord's implication is one which echoes down to us today- we can read, many times, and yet not really read as God intends, and not grasp the most essential meaning of the text. So many times the Lord uses this challenge- 'Have you not / never read?' (in Matthew alone: 12:3,5; 21:16,42; 22:31). This perhaps is one of our greatest temptations in this over-literate age- to read, but not really read.

The parallel Mk. 10:3 records the Lord asking "What did Moses command you?". We note He doesn't say 'command *us*', not because He considered Himself above the Mosaic law, but maybe because the law was a bond of covenant between God and Israel, and He saw Himself as the mediator of a new and different covenant. His point was that Moses had written this command to "you" the hardhearted, those so hard and spiritually dry that they needed such concessions from God (Mk. 10:5)- but the Lord wasn't in that category. The two questions are connected to each other- 'Have you not read?' is followed by a request for them to quote what they had read ["What did Moses command you?"]. This highlights the Lord's point that one can know the text of Scripture and be able to quote it and even sensibly discuss it- without having *really* read it for ourselves in the sense of grasping the personal message and implication for ourselves.

In Mark, the Lord begins His reply by pointing out that Moses' teaching about divorce was "for the hardness of your heart", and was a concession to their weakness not found in God's original intention "at the beginning". Their legalistic mindset considered that if Moses stated something, then it was a command to be obeyed. But the Lord tried to demonstrate there were different levels accepted by God- rather as He had taught in chapter 18 that in the case of personal sin, we can drag the person through the synagogue discipline process, or apply the higher level of forgiveness without qualification and condition. And He repeats that here- seeking to get them to see that the higher level was to stay together and remain in with the process of unity between persons that God wishes to operate; and the lower level would be to make use of Moses' concessions to human hardness. Assuming a literal record of the Lord's words here, Mt. 19:8 repeats the point that Moses allowed divorce "for the hardness of your heart"; the idea of Moses having granted a concession was significant to the Lord. Because His theme here as in chapter 18 was that there are different levels upon which we can live before God, and thus had it ever been.

*Made them male and female*- The whole nature of creation was so that there would be a process of division, separation and then uniting together to produce fruit. The processes of separation and unity were inbuilt to creation, but we are to allow them to operate in the way that God intends- not needlessly separating and not uniting in wrong ways at the wrong times.

19:5 *For this cause*- Although a different original word is used, the idea is clearly the same as in the original question in :3, about whether it was lawful to divorce “for every cause”.

*Leave*- The Hebrew and Greek words for “divorce” mean literally to go or send away from. And this is the same idea which the Lord now uses (although a different original word) in saying that because of how God created humanity, a man will leave or go away from [the same idea as ‘divorce’] his parents and cleave to his wife. The Lord is surely saying that the process of leaving / separating and cleaving to another is natural and intended by God- but it must be done within the bounds of His intentions.

*Cleave to his wife*- Translated in Eph. 5:31 as “shall be joined to his wife”. The reference in my opinion is not to the wedding nor to the sexual act so much as to a process of being joined together, parallel with ‘becoming one flesh’, which is conducted by God in response to a man and woman wishing to come together. This involves His work on the minds of the couple and through orchestrated circumstance in their lives which results in their coming together as one. But the process is ongoing. This is surely a parade example of where God is able and eager to work on the minds of people directly. There could be no falser impression than that an indifferent God faces off against man over an open Bible, leaving it over to us how far we wish to be obedient. He is actively seeking to work in the very inward parts of the minds of His people, by His Spirit, in order to bring us together with Him and each other. The reason why sex before marriage or casual sex is wrong is that this is a physical coming together without the spiritual bonding or joining process which God has promised to perform in the lives of His people. The existence of this bonding process is another reason why marriage to unbelievers is not appropriate- because it will be hard for God to work on the heart of a person who has closed their heart to Him.

*The two will become one*- “*Shall be one flesh*” (AV) is a future tense. The process of unifying works towards a final unity between persons called “one flesh”. It’s hard to say what point is in view here- a point where a married couple are “one flesh” presumably speaks of the consummation of marriage in sexual intercourse. Clearly the whole implication here is that two people cleave to each other whilst at the same time leaving their parental background or family of origin, and during that process there is a psychological process of confirmation going on from God, binding them together; and this then comes to term in “one flesh”. This intended process rules out casual sex, just as it rules out individuals remaining psychologically bonded to their parents or family of origin. The false teaching regarding sexual matters argued that sleeping with

a prostitute was OK so long as it was understood that the sexual act made two into flesh (1 Cor. 6:16); but this of course was just attaching a Bible verse to a situation in order to justify what people wanted to do. In sleeping with a prostitute, two do not become one in the Biblical sense because there has not been the spiritual process of God joining the couple. And that is what is wrong with it.

19:6 *One flesh*- This appears to be a status, referring to marriage rather than solely to the sexual act. Because it is paralleled with “what God has joined together” and is not to be sundered.

*Joined together*- As a couple "cleave" to one another, so they become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). But this becoming one flesh is interpreted by the Lord Jesus as meaning that God actively joins the couple together; as *they* cleave to each other in the process of their relationship, so *God* joins them together. Clearly the Lord understood Gen. 2:24 as speaking of the process of marriage, rather than simply the ceremony of a wedding. In passing, note that the Hebrew idea of two becoming one had already been used in Genesis- the morning and evening, the day and night, were fused by God into one day (Gen. 1:5- the same Hebrew phrase is used). Similarly we read of the waters becoming, or being made one, by God (Gen. 1:9). It's as if the immense power of God in creation is unleashed in His bonding of man and wife together. To put that asunder is to fight against the very creative power of God.

*Let not*- Because by sundering relationships, we are pitting ourselves against the intentions and processes of God's Spirit and His actions amongst men. But of course we can indeed put asunder what God joined. He does not force His ways and processes upon people. The parallel [see on :1] is with how we can refuse acceptance to the ‘little ones’ by despising and not forgiving them. God's processes intend to create unity between His people as well as between marriage partners; but we can chose to disallow the effect of His work, both in our own lives and those of others. By rejecting people, the Lord had taught in the previous section of the chiasmus, we make them stumble and damage the “little ones”. And those same principles apply in marriage- the little ones are made to stumble, and the rejection of a marriage partner often leads them into sin, i.e. they are made to stumble. This I think is the sense of Mt. 5:32, that divorcing a partner causes her to commit adultery- i.e. we will lead her to a sinful life.

*Put asunder*- The same Greek word is used in 1 Cor. 7:10,11,15 of how Paul allows for a wife to “depart” or ‘sunder’ from her husband. Clearly, therefore, the Lord is presenting here an ideal state. But that presentation doesn't mean that God will not tolerate lower levels of living before Him. Man can put asunder what God has joined not simply in our own marriage. It can just as much be done by parents seeking to keep their children within the sphere of the family of origin,

not letting go; by pressurizing one side of a marriage to adopt a position against their partner, etc. Especially is this true of those who demand that a believing husband or wife not have fellowship with their believing partner because of theological or 'fellowship' differences.

19:7 *Why then did Moses command-* They had missed the point, that a concession is not a command. Their legalism required that if something was in the teaching of Moses, then this must be done. But they missed the point that there were actually levels of response within the Mosaic law. Adultery could be simply forgiven, dealt with through the trial of jealousy in Numbers 5, become the basis for divorce, or result in the woman being killed. Such a position is very hard for legalists to cope with, desiring as they do clear definition for every situation in life. Hence the Lord emphasized twice in this dialogue that divorce was a concession for their hard hearts.

*A writing of divorce-* Gk. *Biblion apostasion*, literally this could be understood as 'A Bible / writing of apostasy'. The 'lower level' option of divorce for adultery was all part of a law which was "holy, just and good", but it could so easily be misused and thus lead people into moral apostasy.

*And to put her away-* Their legalism is reflected in how they don't simply say that Moses 'commanded' divorce, but rather than Moses commanded a bill of divorce and then divorce. The legal aspect was all important to them.

19:8 *Hardness of your hearts-* Moses allowed divorce for the hardness of Israel's hearts and yet Moses himself appears to have divorced his wife (Ex. 18:2)- for the hardness of his heart? See Dt. 20:14. This appears to be the second time in this discourse that the Lord talks about the way Moses had made a concession to their weakness- see on 19:4 *Have you not read?*.

*It was not so-* Here we have another connection with the preceding argument in chapter 18 (see on :1). This time, to the statement that "it is not so" (same Greek phrase) that the Father wishes a little one to perish, and therefore we should not cause them to stumble but rather forgive and accept them. The idea is clearly that divorcing a partner, even for adultery, rather than forgiving and accepting them still within the marriage, is likely to cause that straying little one to stumble. And this is the whole context of the Lord's teaching that the higher level is not to divorce for adultery- even though He clearly accepts that as a lower level, in the same way as in chapter 18 He accepts the possibility that in the case of personal offence we can drag the offender through the synagogue disciplinary process and reject them. But the problem with that is that it's likely to cause them to stumble, and we will find it hard to do that if we accept the full import of the

parable with which He concludes chapter 18. We are to perceive ourselves as the serious sinner, the colossally indebted man, who effectively has no option but to forgive all sin against him. Mark's record goes on to use this same phrase "not [to be] so" in Mk. 10:43, in teaching that it is not to be so amongst us, the community of God's people, that we are in any sense superior to each other but rather should be servants to each other. Perhaps that also is relevant to this whole issue of whether we demand what is owed us from those who sin against us, even in the case of adultery within marriage.

In Mark's record, the Lord went on to quote from early Genesis: "But from the beginning of the creation: Male and female made He them. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cling to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh; so that they are no more two but one flesh". It was Moses who wrote Genesis, under Divine inspiration. So the Lord was saying that actually, Moses within his own writings laid down a principle and yet also recorded a concession to weakness. This idea is so hard for the legalistic mind to accept- that within Divine law there are different levels, all is not black and white.

19:9 *I say unto you*- This rubric is usually used when the Lord is replacing commands of Moses with His own higher standard. He appears to be merely repeating the Mosaic teaching- that there was an exception which permitted divorce, namely adultery, but that otherwise, divorce was not be countenanced. But in this case He would appear to have allowed Himself to have been drawn into the debate between Shammai and Hillel, and was coming down directly on the side of Shammai [divorce only for adultery]. This is not His style- the Lord engages with questions thrown at Him by lifting the issues to a different level, rather than answering them on the same level as they were given to Him. Mark's record has the Lord clearly teaching that divorce should not be countenanced for anything, and the disciples respond in amazement that it would be better not to marry rather than sign up for this (:10). Perhaps they held the common chauvinistic view that a wife was almost inevitably adulterous and would likely need to be divorced at some stage in the marriage. The Lord responds to that by saying that He accepted that not all His followers could live by what He was teaching (:11). To understand how "I say unto you" was therefore something radically new and higher than Moses' teaching, we have to therefore include Mark's record of His teaching that there should never be divorce for any reason. He mentions that there should be no divorce "except for *porneia*" in order to clarify in passing that Hillel's view that Moses allowed divorce for literally anything was not correct. But "I say unto you" suggests He was not merely reiterating Moses' position, but adding something new and more demanding. But we only see what that was by putting Mark's account [no divorce for any reason] together with what we have here in Matthew's. Jewish law in the first century *demand*ed that a man divorce his wife for adultery, and in that sense the Lord's principle that ideally he forgive her rather than divorce her was something radically new.

*Send his wife away*- The Lord seems to have in view a situation where a man proactively takes the decision to send his wife away. The implication could be that if he has to send her away, then

she actually wishes to remain with him. The language of sending away surely implies she was still living with him. Therefore what is in view is a situation of unforgiveness on the part of the husband, and that is the entire context of this section of teaching which began in Matthew 18. The adultery was therefore a temporary situation and didn't involve the wife moving in with another man. In such a case, this whole passage is not directly relevant. The more general idea in chapter 18 of dealing with personal sins against us is now in chapter 19 focused down to the classic personal offence, the sin against us of a partner committing adultery. And let us note that the whole passage beginning in chapter 18 is speaking of ideal standards, whilst the Lord is prepared to accept lower standards (:11). Let's remember that in 1 Cor. 7 we are challenged that the single life of devotion to the Lord is the highest level, and marriage in itself is a concession to human weakness which most of us have made use of. And overarching all our thinking about this matter, especially in terms of our response to those who may divorce for not very solid reasons, we have the parable at the end of chapter 18. We are to see ourselves as chief of sinners, with an unpayable and huge debt to the Lord, compared to which all sin against us is of small account. We also need to remember that others' behaviour to each other is not a sin against us. The teaching here is very personal- about how we are to respond to personal sin against us, and here in chapter 19 the specific example of adultery within marriage is raised. This teaching is not really about how we should respond to the sins of others (e.g. divorce for the wrong reasons) which we observe from a distance.

*Porneia*- This is a more general word than *moichao*, the word which refers strictly to 'adultery' and which we find used later in this verse and e.g. in 15:19. Indeed *porneia* appears to be a different category of sexual sin to "adultery" in Heb. 13:4. Remember how this section is an expansion upon the general teaching in chapter 18 about how to respond to personal offences against us. The word in practice, therefore, refers to whatever unfaithfulness constitutes a personal offence against a marital partner. The word could, therefore, just as well refer to the use of pornography. Pushing for a strict interpretation of the word misses the point- that this teaching is in the context of personal offences and forgiving what needs to be forgiven. Any view other than this ends up having to define the word in terms of the insertion of body parts into other body parts; and yet there are a whole range of sexual, mental and emotional positions which may just as well be the *porneia* which a partner must forgive. The Lord's use of *porneia* rather than *moichao* would appear to be a disagreement with Shammai's school, who taught that divorce was possible strictly for *moichao*, adultery. In this we see again that the Lord isn't coming down on either side of the Shammai – Hillel dispute, but rather teaching an altogether higher level.

*Whoever marries her who has been sent away*- I noted above that 'sent away' suggests the woman has committed adultery but remains living with her husband. The "whoever" here may not necessarily be global, as if to say that anyone who marries a divorced woman is an adulterer.

Because clearly the Lord recognizes that adultery breaks the marriage bond and He appears to consider that once that is broken, then remarriage is possible- just as the marriage covenant between God and Israel was broken, and He entered into relationship with another wife, the Gentiles, or more exactly, the body of Christ comprised of whoever (Jew or Gentile) who believes in Christ. It needs to be seriously noted that the English word “whoever” found in many translations doesn’t translate any original Greek word in the text. The text literally reads ‘And the one marrying her who is sent away commits adultery’. That ‘one’ in view could well be the man with whom she has had the affair. This reading means that contrary to how some wish to read these words based on the mistranslation “Whoever”, the Lord is not in fact condemning second marriage. His theme is of forgiveness, and of the spiritual damage done by not forgiving. If a man will not forgive his wife for an isolated act of adultery, then he is likely to lead her towards marrying the man she sinned with and thereby falling deeper into sin. And her husband’s lack of forgiveness will have played a part in making her stumble in this way. This is how I would understand the Lord’s teaching in Mt. 5:32, that sending away a wife causes her to commit adultery. See on :10 *The man*.

19:10 *The case of the man*- See on 19:9 *I say unto you*. But *aitia*, translated “case”, more commonly means an accusation, a legal case against someone. The idea is probably that if by marrying a divorcee or by remarrying after divorce a man is really going to be accused of adultery, then it is better not to marry in the sense of remarrying in the cases the Lord has just outlined. On this reading, they would not be fearful of first marriage, marriage as a concept, but rather of the kind of marriage after a marriage breakup which appears to be adulterous in the Lord’s eyes. He therefore goes straight on in :11 to assure them that although they have indeed understood Him correctly, He is talking of ideal standards and is prepared to accept lower achievements and to make concessions to human weakness in this area.

*The man*- The presence of the article suggests that a specific man or case is in view- and this would be ‘the one’ who marries the woman whom he has had an affair with whilst still living with her first husband, whom he ‘sends away’.

*Not good*- They thought that the Lord’s policy of no remarriage in this case meant that marriage was “not good”. And yet the Genesis record clearly states that it was “not good” for a man to be unmarried. Matthew in his own [over-ruled] word choice seems to be commenting how they were out of step with the spirit of Genesis. However, the Greek reads *sumphero* [‘profitable’, ‘good’] *ou* [not] *gameo* [‘marry’], and a better translation would be ‘It is good / profitable not to marry’. The ‘marrying’ they had in mind was surely the case of marrying a married woman with whom one had had an affair, for this is the ‘marrying’ of the immediate context in :9. The Lord has just used *sumphero*, “good”, in 18:6 in saying that those who offend little ones would be

“better” cast into the sea with a millstone around their neck. And He had used it twice earlier in saying that it is “profitable” to lose our dearest body parts and enter the Kingdom, rather than offend a little one and be rejected from it (Mt. 5:29,30). Given the connections between this section about marriage and the earlier teaching about offending little ones in chapter 18 (see on :1), these occurrences of the same word can’t be incidental. Note too that 1 Cor. 7:35 speaks of the single life as being for our “profit” [s.w.] - and Paul’s teaching there about marriage is full of allusion to the Lord’s words here in Mt. 19. The disciples could therefore be read as agreeing with their Lord - it is profitable / good not to marry - in the specific case in view, which is if a man has an affair with a married woman and then is faced with the choice of marrying her. The Lord then almost rushes on to say that in this whole area of sexual and moral failure and less than ideal marital situations, there is the possibility of following Him still even if lower level decisions have been taken and sins committed. The “eunuchs” that He now speaks about in :12 are those for whom marriage was not possible - but His point is, that for some this is simply too much to “receive”, and the implication is that He encourages people to accept the higher level (“let him receive it”) whilst accepting those who don’t.

The New Testament is full of examples of concessions to human weakness. 1 Cor. 7 is a chapter full of this kind of thing. You could paraphrase it something like this: 'Basically, consider the option of not marrying. *But and if* you do, it's no sin. Once married, don't separate; *but and if* you do, this is allowable. If you are an elderly widow, it's best not to re-marry; *but and if* you do, OK go ahead'. The Lord Jesus recognized that these sorts of concessions to failures in married life had been made earlier; He spoke of how God through Moses had "for the hardness of your hearts" allowed divorce under the Law, although this was hardly God's original ideal in Eden (Mt. 19:8). The Lord Jesus spoke the word to His listeners "as they were able to hear it" (Mk. 4:33), following the same pattern. The exceptive clause, allowing divorce for adultery, is a prime example of this kind of concession. And yet the Lord speaks in Mark 10 as if there is no allowance for divorce even in this case; whilst in Matthew’s record He clearly allows it. The point is, God doesn’t advertise His concessions to human weakness (and neither should we). He leads men to attempt life on the highest level. Likewise Num. 6:7 speaks as if a man *couldn't* make himself unclean and end his vow, whereas in fact there was legislation which allowed him to take this lower level. But the Father doesn’t want us to be minimalists, serving Him at the lowest level; quite to the contrary.

19:10-12 - see on 5:43.

19:11 *All cannot receive this saying* - The saying is surely that of :9 which is prefaced by: “I say unto you” - the saying that putting away your wife and remarrying is adulterous. To the legalistic mind, this is so hard to accept that - that a statement that certain behaviour in a given context is adulterous can actually be ignored or broken on the basis that the strength to ‘receive’ it was not given.

*To whom it is given-* The strength to obey is a gift, just as repentance (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25; 2 Pet. 3:9 Gk.) and other spiritual fruits are gifts; and in this case, it is not given to all. Again, this is hard for the legalist to accept. It is given to some to receive a saying of Jesus- and not to others. Our greatest obediences, therefore, can never be felt to be purely the triumph of our own strength of will. Even they are gifts of grace. Being 'given' the ability to 'receive' the Lord's word is expressed in terms of being "able" to receive it (:12). No other teacher apart from the Lord would have been so profound as to say that what He was teaching could only be obeyed if we are 'given' the strength to do so. And yet the idea which follows of making ourselves eunuchs for the Kingdom indicates a huge amount of willpower and conscious effort, in order to live up to the potential made possible for us.

19:12 *Made eunuchs of men-* Perhaps the idea is that there are some people who are put into a position in which they cannot remarry due to the failures of others [cp. "of men"]. The purpose of making men eunuchs was so that they would be faithful servants of a king- and the King in our case is the Lord Jesus.

*Made themselves eunuchs-* By the literal cutting off of a body part. In this we see another connection with chapter 18, where the Lord had taught that it was better to cut off body parts in order not to offend a little one (18:7-9). The teaching not to divorce and remarry, to remain single if need be, was therefore not just a command with no reason behind it. The intention, according to the parallel with 18:7-9, was in order not to make the woman concerned stumble because of your unforgiveness of her. Once we perceive this context of forgiveness and not causing to stumble, we realize that the whole teaching here is not about divorce and remarriage in a global context, but specifically as to what to do in the case that a wife commits adultery as a one-time event, whilst she remains living with her first husband. This was the context of the initial question- is it possible to forgive so unconditionally, as Jesus had just taught, even if your wife commits adultery? And the answer to that is 'yes'. It may be in certain cases of failure that one remains single, making themselves a eunuch, but the decision will be in order not to make another little one stumble and sin. The one caused to stumble may be the first partner, or it could be the woman to whom the husband is subsequently married. This desire not to cause others to stumble, especially the partners involved, is what should be the guiding principle in all our thinking about this vexed topic.

*For the Kingdom of Heaven's sake-* This is to be paralleled with the command to cut off body parts *in order to the enter the Kingdom* in 18:7-9.

*Receive it-* The Greek literally means 'to have space for'. We have here the Lord's recognition of varying spiritual capacities, and His other parables suggest the same in talking of varying amounts of spiritual wealth being given to different servants, with His expectation of differing response. And it is for this reason that our ultimate status in His Kingdom shall vary- one star differs from another in glory, one rules over five cities, another over two. Of course we are all inclined to think that we are one talent material, that this is not given to me to live by. But in this

lies the crucial need for a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus within which we ask Him to reveal to us what are His hopes and expectations of us, the nature of our talents and callings.

*19:13 Brought unto Him little children-* This continues the connection with the beginning of this section in chapter 18, which began with a little child being brought to the Lord and Him making the disciples open their closed circle in order to accept the one whom they considered so far beneath them spiritually. He taught then, and teaches again here, that they were to see in the children symbols of themselves, in all their weakness and misunderstanding. In the same way as here the children are “brought” to Jesus, so we often read in the Gospels of people [including the disciples] being “brought” to Him. Their [and our] salvation depends partly upon others having brought us to Him.

*Put His hands on them and pray-* The Lord agrees to the request, blessing little ones for the sake of the efforts of third parties who bring them to Him (as in Mk. 2:5 and so often in the work of saving and curing men). As the children ‘received’ this blessing, so the Lord urges the disciples to ‘receive’ the things of the Kingdom- for Mk. 10:15 records the Lord’s further comment that “whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it”. Those children receiving His grace and blessing, all the more gracious because they received it thanks to others bringing them to it, represent each disciple who receives the grace and blessing of the Kingdom.

*The disciples rebuked them-* Just as they had turned away the little one in chapter 18, as they sought to send away the hungry crowds, forbade John’s disciples and tried to turn away the Syro-Phoenician woman. And they did this despite the Lord’s sober warning that turning away little ones is making them stumble, and will lead to eternal rejection from God’s Kingdom. The disciples in their preaching, of which the Gospels are transcripts, were stressing how they had so failed to grasp this vital teaching.

*19:14 Suffer-* See on 18:12 *Leave*.

*Forbid them not-* The Lord rebuked the disciples for 'forbidding' John's disciples and the little ones to come to Him (Mk. 9:38); and yet He uses the same word to describe how the lawyers hindered [s.w. 'forbad'] people to enter the Kingdom. There's a very clear parallel here between the disciples and their Jewish teachers who had so influenced their thinking. But they finally got there- for Peter insisted that Gentiles should not be forbidden [s.w. 'hinder'] baptism (Acts 10:47); and he uses the same word again when he says that now, he will not "withstand [s.w. 'hinder'] God in hindering people to come to Him (Acts 11:17). The awfulness of the disciples' attitude is brought out by the use of the word in 1 Thess. 2:16, where Paul says that the way the Jews 'forbad' or hindered the preaching of the Gospel was cause for the wrath of God to come upon them "to the uttermost". And the disciples initially followed their Jewish elders in this kind of behaviour. In passing, there is a sober warning here to those who would likewise 'forbid' baptism to those who sincerely seek it, and who will not allow ‘little ones’ to the Lord’s table.

Mk. 10:15 adds: "Whoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it". This is exactly how the whole section began in Matthew (18:3). The Greek for "receive" is often used about people accepting the Gospel. The implication is that one can receive the Gospel of the Kingdom of God- and yet not enter it, because we didn't receive it as a child. We didn't accept that we are the 'little ones', accepting we know so little, and just marvelling at the special grace being shown us which we accept in awed wonder. The language of 'entering the Kingdom' is used both of our final entry into the Kingdom when Christ returns (Mt. 25:10,21; Jn. 3:5), and of our current entering the Kingdom. The rich man can enter the Kingdom right now if he sheds the load of his wealth (Mt. 19:23,24). The Scribes stopped and hindered those who were entering the Kingdom from entering, locking the door through which the Kingdom could now be entered, all because they chose not to enter themselves (Mt. 23:13; Lk. 11:52). So it's a case of 'Now but not yet'. We do *now* enter into God's rest, and yet we are promised that we *will* enter that rest at Christ's return (Heb. 4:1-11). The Lord had warned that our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes, or we will likewise not enter the Kingdom (Mt. 5:20); but that righteousness is in accepting the blessing of righteousness as a little child; for without *that* we shall not enter the kingdom. Those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom (Mt. 7:21)- and that will is to be as little children and accept gifts without seeking to justify ourselves or earn them.

Mark and Luke both add that "Whoever shall not *receive* the Kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter therein" (Lk. 18:17). The Greek word for "receive" is different to that used here in :12, where the Lord bids those able to "receive" the highest standard concerning remarriage to do so. But the idea is surely the same. How do we 'receive' His high standards and challenges in personal decision making? By receiving them as those children received His blessings, not arguing back, accepting whatever comes from His hand, not considering that we are in any position to do anything other than receive what He gives us. Note that the children *receiving* His blessings become, therefore, the pattern for our *receiving* His demands upon our personal living, our forgiveness even of adulterous partners, our rejection of legitimate options of remarriage [in some cases] in order to follow His higher standards. This is nothing less than profound.

19:15 *Laid His hands on them*- His blessing was and is mediated without physical contact. The need for physical contact in order to receive blessing was embedded in the religious mentality of the time, and is seen to this day in so many rituals and traditions of the Catholic and Orthodox churches. The sick woman thought to herself that if she could only *touch* Jesus, she would be made whole; but He responded that He made her whole because of *her faith* (9:21,22). He was gently correcting her mistaken understanding of the power of touch. And yet the Lord made a concession to this misunderstanding by indeed touching the children as requested.

19:16 *One came*- Mark adds that he came running to Him and kneeled before Him.

*What good thing*- The man was clearly influenced by the Jewish idea that one supreme good deed could assure the doer of salvation. This was particularly popular amongst the zealots, who considered that suicidal attacks on the Romans could assure them of salvation; the same mentality is to be found in Islamic suicide bombers today. But in His typical manner, the Lord doesn't address the misunderstanding but rather works with it. He ends up telling the man that if he sells all he has and gives to the poor, then he will have "treasure in Heaven" (:21). This, therefore, isn't a global command to every Christian. It was designed especially for this young man who thought that just one great act of obedience would secure salvation. The Lord went along with this by giving him such an example; but added: "And come and follow Me", thus gently correcting the idea that one great act is enough for salvation.

*Shall I do*- Rom. 7:19 is Paul's allusion here, where he laments that like the young man, the good that he would do [same Greek words] he finds himself unable to do because of the sin that dwells within him. But instead of walking away from the Lord as this man did, Paul threw himself upon the Lord's grace. This zealous young man was also understood by Peter as representative of us all; for he clearly alludes to him in 1 Pet. 3:10,11: "He who would love life and see good days [cp. the young man wanting to "have eternal life"]... let him... do good" (same Greek words).

*Have eternal life*- Mk. 10:17 notes that he also asked what he must do to "inherit" eternal life, as if he considered eternity a right that he must receive if he does only one great deed. The disciples heard the Lord assuring His people that those who follow Him will "have eternal life", enter the Kingdom, enter into life, etc. But having heard all that, Peter asked: "We have left all... what shall we have?" (Mt. 19:27). The irony of it all is tragic. They'd just been promised they would "have" eternal life. But that wasn't enough. Their focus was very much on this life; what shall we have *here and now*? They couldn't see very much beyond the present, past the curvature of their earth. Ruth's unnamed relative could have been her redeemer; but when he realized he would have to marry her and have children, and split up his fields into more strips so as to give those children an inheritance along with that of his existing children- he pulled out. He wouldn't 'mar his inheritance'. He saw ahead to his death, to the next generation. His horizon was 20 years at most. But Boaz who didn't think like this established his spiritual inheritance eternally, and is therefore mentioned in the Lord's genealogy. Whilst the short sighted man passed off the page of history anonymously; his name wasn't preserved.

19:17 *Why do you call Me good?*- The Greek of the subsequent sentence may not mean that the Lord was implying 'Only God is good- I am not good'. Translators have added a number of words to try to flesh out the meaning of the words. The sense could just as well be 'None is as good as the one God'- and therefore, we should keep *His* commandments. In other words, the Lord is not so much saying that He Himself is not 'good' but rather refocusing the man's direction away from Himself towards the Father. For the man had come running to Him asking what he should do in order to inherit or rightfully have eternal life. And the Lord is refocusing

the man upon the Father and the Father's commandments. The Lord may therefore have a rhetorical sense in His question 'why do you call Me good?'. His sense would have been: 'Why are you so keen to call me "good", setting me on a level with God? Instead, focus on obeying God's commandments and tackle your hardest challenge- to give away your wealth, and then follow Me in the itinerant life towards the cross'. The man's overly high and unrealistic view of Jesus, as if He were God Himself, was really an excuse for his own refusal to face the challenge of living the Christian life. Every false doctrine has a psychological basis, and the idea that Jesus is God and the Trinity are no different. To accept Jesus as less than God, as totally human, is a far deeper challenge to our living than accepting Jesus as being God Himself. If Jesus was human, sharing our own flesh, in which there dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:18), and yet was able to be perfect- this lays down a huge challenge to each of us. It's far less challenging to accept Jesus as God and therefore good and perfect by nature. This is why I suggest the Lord is probing *why* the man called Him "good"- and redirected him towards the need for keeping the commandments and living the committed life in practice. So we have here a passage of deep significance for discussions about the Trinity. The Lord cites the unity of God as meaning that He alone is ultimately 'good', and challenges the man who wanted to treat Him as God as to whether this was not just an excuse for not doing the hard work of following Him in practice.

*Enter into life-* This is in response to the man's request that to know what to do that he might *have* eternal life. He saw the eternal life as beginning at judgment day, and thought he could do one great act now in order to assure getting that life then. The Lord tells him that he must "Come follow Me" (:21)- it was a way of life rather than one great act of sacrifice that was required. And we enter into life now, in that we can begin living the kind of life we will eternally live. The man had separated the future Kingdom from present life in a way that we are all tempted to. The future begins now in this respect. The Lord Jesus is the Kingdom of God (Lk. 17:21); *He* is the salvation of God rather than anything physical (Lk. 3:6). The Lord paralleled entering into the Kingdom with entering into "life" (Mt. 19:17 cp. Mt. 19:23; Mt. 18:3 cp. Mt. 18:8). He saw being in the Kingdom as essentially being about a *life* that would be enjoyed.

*Keep the commandments-* The Lord uses *tereo* for "keep", and the young man replies that he has "kept" the commandments from his youth, using *phulasso* (:20), which more has the sense of 'preserving'. His legalistic mind prides itself on having preserved the statement of faith, as it were; he has not [as the Scribes endlessly feared] added to the commandments but has preserved the correct text. But the Lord uses a word which implies more to obey and live by the commandments. The same mentality is perceivable in the one talent man, who kept his talent in pristine condition- but didn't use it (25:25). One problem with legalistic attitudes to statements of faith is that they can give the impression that the entire duty of man is to preserve them to the letter; when the Christian life is a call to obedience and action, rather than mere intellectual, theoretical preservation of ideas, however correct those ideas may be as theories.

The question of course is why the Lord chose to repeat the last six commandments of the ten

commandments. Perhaps He perceived that they had special relevance to this rich young ruler. Harry Whittaker makes an interesting but not totally convincing case that the rich young man here was Barnabas and these commands were very relevant to him as a Levite- see *Studies in the Gospels* chapter 148.

19:18,19 Paul's references to the Gospels suggests that he had carefully meditated upon the passages to which he consciously alludes. The fact and way in which he *alludes* rather than quotes verbatim reflects the fact he had thought through and absorbed the teaching of the passages rather than learning them parrot fashion. Here in Mt. 19:18,19 the Lord Jesus combines two quotations from the Law: Ex. 20:12-16 followed by Lev. 19:18. Paul, in a different context, to prove a different point, combines those same two passages, although separating them by a brief comment (Rom. 13:9). This surely indicates that he had meditated upon how his Lord was using the Law, and mastered it so that he could use it himself.

19:20 *The youth*- The record stresses the incongruity and inappropriacy of the young man's self-righteousness: "The *youth* answered, all these have I kept from my *youth* up". He was young- and he says that since a young man he had kept all the commands. Now the Lord doesn't lecture him about self-righteousness, nor does He point out that the young man is way over rating his own spirituality and obedience. Instead, the Master focuses on the positive- as if to say 'You are zealous for perfection? Great! So, sell what you have and give to the poor. Go on, rise up to the challenge!'.

*What do I still lack?*- Mk. 10:21 provides the Lord's answer: "One thing you *lack* [s.w.]", but the "one thing" was to distribute his wealth and to follow Christ. The two things seem therefore related; it was the wealth which was stopping the following of Christ. The man had come to the Lord asking what great deed he must do to obtain eternal life, and so he was aware of his obedience to the commandments. He obviously felt that obedience to Mosaic law was not going to be the basis of eternal life, and he sensed that there was some great deed he must yet achieve. Therefore "What do I still lack?" shouldn't be read as an arrogant statement that he lacked nothing because he had been legally obedient. Rather is it a genuine question, seeking a concrete, clear and achievable answer.

19:21 *If you will be perfect*- The Lord is saying that if the man wants to serve Him on the highest level, then he should sell all and give to the poor. And the man went away from Christ because of that. Because in his pride, he considered he was serving already on the highest level. This introduction of the idea of different levels of service is seamlessly in context with the teaching about 'receiving' the Lord's high standards concerning divorce and remarriage; but the Lord had recognized that not all were able to reach them. And this incident happens in demonstration of this principle. The man could have humbled himself as a little child, and admitted he couldn't rise to that standard of selling all- and yet still begged to be allowed a place as a Christ follower.

And surely the Lord would have accepted him, because there is no evidence that literally selling all we have is a global requirement for men to enter the Kingdom. Zacchaeus only have *half* of his goods away (Lk. 19:8). This is, therefore, encouragement for all who feel they can't rise up to the highest standards. There is still a place for them, for all of us- for we all fail to attain them. Only our pride will turn us away because of their existence and our failure to attain them. The incident also functions as a foil for those who think they are in a position to condemn those who don't rise up to the highest level regarding divorce and remarriage- have they, with their perfect marriages, sold all they have and given to the poor? If not, then allow others likewise to live on a lower level in other areas of human life. See on :26 *With God all things are possible*.

*Sell what you have*- We note that the Lord treated each person differently. Jesus approved Zacchaeus' distribution of only half of his possessions- whilst demanding that the rich young man give away literally all. And He never seems to have demanded that those of His followers who owned houses should sell them. See on :16 *What good thing*. The same principle is seen in His preceding teaching about divorce and remarriage- His ideal standard is not 'given' to everyone, just as it is not a requirement of everyone that they sell and they have and give to the poor. The Lord taught that we receive the Lord's goods [s.w. "what you have"] on conversion to Him (25:14). We resign all, but receive all. By giving away our earthly wealth, we directly receive wealth in Heaven. Lk. 12:15,33,44 make a sustained play on this Greek word: "A man's life doesn't consist in the abundance of the *things which he possesses* [s.w.]... *sell what you have* [s.w.] and give alms... [the Lord] will make [such a man] ruler over all *that he has* [s.w.]". Whilst the specific command to the young man to sell all he had and give it to the poor was not in one sense universal, i.e. not a command to every believer, yet the spirit of it (according to Luke 12) is indeed to be followed by us all. We must at least "forsake ['to bid farewell to'] all that [we] have [s.w.]" (Lk. 14:33). The early believers did not 'say' that anything they possessed [s.w.] was their own (Acts 4:32)- Luke surely intends us to connect this with his earlier record of how the Lord had taught that our attitude, at very least, must be that we do not really 'own' those things which we apparently 'have'.

Luke adds: "One thing you lack...". The Lord was quoting from the LXX of Ps. 23:1. Because the Lord [Jesus] is our shepherd, "not one thing is lacking to me". The selling and sharing of his wealth is paralleled by the Lord with following Him. The one thing that was lacking was to shed his wealth *and* follow Christ. To follow Christ, to have Him as our shepherd, is therefore no merely intellectual affair, nor is it a question of legalistic obedience to a set of principles we inherited from our youth. It requires the most painful sacrifices.

*Give to the poor*- Lk. 18:22 uses the word "distribute". The Lord laboured the point: 'Give, yes go out and distribute the proceeds, to the poor'. Luke again uses the word in describing how the early believers did indeed sell their possessions and 'distribute' to the poor within the ecclesia (Acts 4:35).

*Treasure in Heaven-* Alluded to in James 1:12.

19:22 *Heard that saying-* When he understood the *logos*, the essential intention of the Lord's teaching.

*Sorrowful-* Mk. 10:22 describes him as "sad", literally the Greek means that he became overcast, as the sky clouding over. His joy, therefore, was because he had wrongly assumed that he could do some simple dramatic act well within his comfort zone, and thus attain an assurance of salvation. But his face clouded over when he realized that he was being called outside of his comfort zone. This is an exact picture of the disillusion which clouds so many once they perceive that the call of Christ is not to a mere social club or to surface level religion.

*He went away-* This is significant because the entire section starting from chapter 18:1 is purposefully framed so that the incidents connect with each other. The Lord had welcomed the little children to come to Him, and rebuked the disciples for forbidding them. This young man- also a 'little one'- went away from the Lord. The implication is that the little children had more spirituality and devotion to Christ than this man. The exhortation to become like little children therefore meant that whatever stops us coming to Him must be jettisoned- and for this 'young one', it was his wealth.

*Possessions-* Again Luke's record of the early church alludes here, speaking of how possessions were sold and the money distributed to the poorer believers (Acts 2:45; 5:1 s.w.).

19:23 *Shall hardly-* The sense is not simply that it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom, but that he shall enter with difficulty. The Lord goes on to say that such shall enter the Kingdom only by God's grace and possibility of saving those who do not rise up to the higher levels that He bids us to (:26). In what, then, is the hardness or difficulty- if God is willing to accept our living on lower levels? The difficulty is in not walking away from Christ as the young man did, because of our pride; what is hard is to be like a child, the model throughout this entire discourse, and simply accept God's grace in Christ.

*Enter into the Kingdom-* The man walked away, whereas if he had cast himself upon the Lord's grace, or better still, sold what he had and given to the poor, then he could have right then begun to enter into the Kingdom. We begin entering the Kingdom right now; we are, according to another teaching, walking on the road to the judgment, and must get right with our brother who walks on the way there with us. The parable of the camel (i.e. the rich would-be believer) being unloaded of its wealth before it enters the city (Mt.19:23,24) represents a rich man entering the Kingdom (the city = the Kingdom, as in Rev.22:14; 21:2; Heb.13:14; 11:16; a city can also represent believers). If he sheds his riches now, it follows he is then able in some sense to enter the Kingdom now. This mini parable is in the context of Mt.19:21: "Sell that thou hast... and thou shalt have (now) treasures in (the Kingdom of) Heaven". This is the same idea as in

Mt.18:4: "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child (which necessitates parting with riches etc.), the same is (now) greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven". In these few words is our highest challenge.

Paul had thought deeply about the parables. He doesn't just half-quote them in an offhand way. For example, Paul saw the rich man of Mt. 19:23 as actually one who *wanted* to be rich (= 1 Tim. 6:9,10). So Paul had thought through the parable. He saw that possession of riches alone wouldn't choke a man; he saw that the Lord was using "riches" as meaning 'the desire for riches'. And because "riches" are relative and subjective, this must be right. And therefore the Spirit was able to use Paul's deductions. My point is that the Spirit *could* have used just anyone to write (e.g.) 1 Tim. 6:9. But it was no accident that God chose to use a man with a fine knowledge and appreciation of His Son to be His pen-man.

19:24- See on 7:13.

*Again I say-* Note the double repetition of this powerful point- that wealth makes entry into the Kingdom difficult.

*The eye of a needle-* I go with the old explanation that this is an allusion to a loaded camel needing to be unloaded of its 'wealth' so that it could squeeze through the pedestrian gate- a call to become human, to realize we are naked before God, and our wealth adds nothing to us. Mark's record uses a term for "the eye of a needle" which the Septuagint always uses for "the holes of the rocks" (e.g. Jud. 6:2; 15:8,11; Jer. 13:4; 16:16), from whence we see the idea of a hole in the rocky city walls.

In the beauty and depth of His simplicity, the Lord comprehended all this in some of the most powerful sentences of all time: *It is very hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom. He must shed his riches, like the camel had to unload to pass through the needle gate (Mt. 19:24).* This is such a powerful lesson. And it's so simple. It doesn't need any great expositional gymnastics to understand it. Like me, you can probably remember a few things very vividly from your very early childhood. I remember my dear dad showing me this as a very young child, with a toy camel and a gate drawn on a piece of paper. And I saw the point, at four, five, maybe six. It is *so clear*. But what of our bank balances now, now we're old and brave? It's easier for a camel, the Lord said. Why? Surely because someone else unloads the camel, he (or she) has no say in it. But in the story, surely we must be the camel who unloads himself, who shakes it all off his humps, as an act of the will. And as we've seen, the spirit of all this applies to every one of us, including those without bank accounts.

19:25 *Exceedingly amazed*- A strong term. They were really so shocked that wealth made it hard to enter the Kingdom, implying they were strongly persuaded that wealth was a gift from God and a sign of His approval of a man. This of course was quite foreign to the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and other teaching of the Lord, and Matthew uses this strong term to highlight how far they had been from understanding His most basic teachings.

*Can be saved*- "Can" translates the same word the Lord uses in the next verse to say that with God, even the saving of the wealthy who don't quit their wealth is "possible"- on the basis, therefore, of His willingness to accept a lower standard of achievement to that He ideally requires. And this is in the context of His offering a lower standard to unconditional forgiveness in chapter 18 (you can not do this if your brother sins against you, and instead drag him through the synagogue disciplinary process), and His demand for forgiveness of adultery (although if you fail in this you can take the lower level and divorce your partner- if it is not 'given' to you to accept that standard).

19:26 *Beheld them*- The Lord maintained eye-contact with His listeners: Mt. 19:26; Mk. 3:5,34; 5:32; 8:33; 10:21, 23,27; Lk. 6:10; 20:17; 22:61; Jn. 1:42. These are all separate occurrences; the fact is really being emphasized. This paying appropriate attention with eye contact is also a good strategy for matching the silences that occur from time to time in any serious conversation. Most of us can tell when another is thinking by observing the eyes, and when they are not their eyes will tell you. The way the Lord Jesus had of lifting up His eyes was something which evidently struck the Gospel writers (Lk. 6:20; Jn. 6:5; 11:41; 17:1 cp. the emphasis upon the eyes of the risen Lord in Rev. 1:14; 2:18; 5:6; 19:12).

*With God*- The status of *para* God is often applied to the Lord Jesus (Lk. 2:52; Jn. 6:46; 8:40; 16:27; Acts 2:33). The suggestion could be that because of the status of the Lord Jesus with the Father, such gracious salvation is possible which would be impossible if men simply had to have the steel will to obey the Father's ideal principles.

*With God all things are possible*- Lifted from the Septuagint of the word to Sarah about the birth of Isaac (Gen. 18:14). Those Old Testament heroes were not merely stained glass figures- our own belief in salvation regardless of wealth is as dramatic as the belief of an old woman that she could have a child. The context here, however, is talking of how those who choose a lower level- in this case, *not* selling their wealth and giving to the poor- can still be saved by God's gracious possibility. This harmonizes with the whole theme of :12, that to some is 'given' the possibility

of living on the idea level regarding divorce and remarriage, but if that cannot be attained to, then God will still accept us. See on :21 *If you will be perfect* and :25 *Can be saved*.

There are at least two instances in the Gospels where the Lord Jesus is quarrying his language from the book of Job, and shows a certain identification of himself with Job. In Mt. 19:23-26 the Lord explains the irrelevance of riches to the spiritual good of entering the Kingdom, saying that "with God all things are possible" - without money. This is almost quoting Job 42:2, where Job comes to the conclusion that all human strength is meaningless: "I know that Thou canst do everything". It may be that Jesus is even implying that through the tribulation of his life he had come to the same conclusion as Job. See too 5:27-30.

19:27 *Left all*- The family based structure of the first century is hard to fully empathize with from our distance. Family was all. Peter comments that the disciples had "left our own homes" (Lk. 18:28 RVmg.), and the parallel Mt. 19:27 says "left *all*". Your home was your all. To have to leave it for the sake of Christ was the most fundamental thing you could do. Hence the real meaning in the first century of the Lord's response that such converts would receive families in this life, i.e. in their relationships in the ecclesia. And yet the radical call of Christ is no less demanding and intrusive as men and women meet it today, the only difference being that the starkness of the choices is less pronounced today- but just as essentially real.

I have repeatedly mentioned that the material in chapter 19 is strongly related to that in chapter 18. The Greek here for "left / forsook all" is identical to that in 18:32: "I *forgave* you *all*". Peter had balked at the idea of 'forgiving all'. It is easier to 'forsake' [s.w. 'forgive'] all material things than to *forgive* all. This explains why the incident of the rich young man follows the teaching about the need to forgive all. He would not forsake all, just as some would not forgive all. Peter claims to have forsaken all, and yet it's apparent that he struggled with the idea of *forgiving* all, thinking that seven times / day was more than generous enough of him. Likewise one wonders whether Peter had really forsaken all materially- he still had a wife, and apparently his fishing boats back in Galilee, to which he returned after the Lord's resurrection.

*And followed You*- Just as Peter's claim to have "left all" was perhaps questionable, likewise Peter seems to have under-estimated what 'following Christ' really meant- for the idea of carrying the cross is strongly connected with following Christ (10:38; 16:24). And Peter failed to carry that cross to the end, for he denied the Lord when the going got tough.

*What shall we have therefore?*- The emphasis is on the word "we". The Lord had taught that the rich needed to give up their wealth if they were to be saved- but God's grace was enough to make even their salvation possible if they didn't rise up to that higher level. Peter considered that he and the disciples *had* given up what wealth they had. And the Lord agrees with Peter- indeed, there would be great blessings for them in the future Kingdom.

Peter had the impression that by forsaking all and following the Lord, he would somehow benefit. He still had to learn that the carrying of the cross is not to be motivated by any desire for personal benefit, spiritual or otherwise. We live in a world in which religion, like everything else, is seen as a means toward some personal benefit. If we love the Lord, we will follow Him, wherever the life in Him leads us; sheerly for love of Him, and recognition that His way is the way to glorifying the Father. Peter had left all, but expected something back. For the excellency of fellowshiping the sufferings of the future Saviour, Moses gave up all the riches of Egypt. The Lord responded by saying that nobody who had left all *for His Name's sake* would go unrewarded (Mt. 19:29). The riches, the surpassing excellence of Christ, all the things tied up in His Name, these were not appreciated at that time by Peter. They are enough, purely of themselves, to make a man count all things as dung. Later, he understood this. He told the lame man that the silver and gold which he had was the salvation possible in the Name of Jesus (Acts 3:6). Peter rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name, and he preached in that Name. There is quite some emphasis on this: Acts 2:21,28; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,30; 5:41. Now he had learnt his mistake, or rather he realized the poverty of his understanding of the Lord. He now found the excellency of the Lord's Name an imperative of itself to witness to it. Likewise "for his name's sake they went forth" in obedience to the great preaching commission (3 Jn. 7; Rev. 2:3).

19:28 *You which have followed Me*- This is in response to Peter's claim that they had "left all and followed You" (:27). The Lord doesn't include Peter's claim that they had "left all", but rather focuses upon the 'following Me'. This may well have been because He knew that Peter had not in fact "left all" to the degree that Peter thought he had (see on :27). They hadn't then grasped the idea of what really following involved; they hadn't in one way or another laid down their lives with Christ. And then there is the problem of "twelve". Judas didn't follow to the end, and will not sit upon a throne in the Kingdom. The Lord surely means, therefore: "You who will have followed me...". Or is that He spoke of "the twelve" as a title for the group of disciples, and what He meant was that even at that early stage He counted their desire to follow Him to the cross as if they had done it? We must see our failing, following brethren likewise. He counted His sheep as following Him (Jn. 10:27) even then, although he knew they were not then strong enough to follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36). The risen Lord especially wanted the women to tell Peter that He was 'going before him' to Galilee (Mk. 16:7)- with the implication that even in his

weakness and dejection, He wanted Peter to still try to follow Him and re-live the cross in his life.

The Lord was so generous spirited towards His disciples. He knew that Peter would not follow Him as planned, to the cross- indeed, none of them would (Jn. 13:36,37), but He speaks to them as if they would be successful ultimately in following Him.

*The regeneration-* The reference is to the last day, when the Kingdom of God as it was in the form of Israel will be regenerated / restored. But the only other occurrence of the word is in speaking of baptism as “the washing of regeneration” (Tit. 3:5). The Kingdom experience and process begins now- a thought which although common in the NT probably fails to grip us as it should. For is our own depressed and passive spiritual experience today really the Kingdom life as it could be? The Greek word literally means ‘the re-naturing’. The final and ultimate change of nature will be at the last day, but the essence of such regeneration begins now.

*Son of Man-* As so often, the term is here associated with the glory and judgment reigning of Jesus. This is because His glorification is on the basis of His having been so human.

*Twelve thrones-* The Lord foresaw the twelve *who at the time included Judas* sitting in glory upon twelve thrones. The question therefore arises as to whether or not the Lord knew Judas would betray Him, and if He did [as He says He did], then why did He apparently trust Him? Samson trusted Delilah and yet knew on another level she would betray him. This is just a common psychological condition. It helps explain why the Lord Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray him (Jn. 6:64), and yet how He could really trust in Judas as his own familiar friend, confide in him (Ps. 41:9), tell him that he would sit with the other eleven on thrones in the Kingdom (Mt. 19:28). This was ever a serious contradiction for me, until considering the Samson : Delilah relationship in depth. A man can know something about someone on one level, but act and feel towards them in a quite different way than this knowledge requires. David likewise must have known Absalom’s deceit; but he chose not to see it, for love’s sake. “They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things [just as Absalom did in the gate]...but I, as a deaf man, heard not” (Ps. 38:12,13). Paul surely knew how Corinth despised him, how little they knew and believed, and as he himself said, the more he loved them, the less they loved him. And yet in all honesty he could say: “As ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence and in your love to us” (2 Cor. 8:7). Yet the more abundantly he loved them, the less

they loved him- not the more abundantly. Yet he saw them as loving him abundantly. One also gets the sense that the Gibeonites' deception was somehow guessed by the elders of Israel, but against their better judgment they disregarded the tell-tale signs (Josh. 9:7). Or Amasa, taking no heed to the sword in Joab's hand- against his better judgment, surely (2 Sam. 20:10). This is a feature of human nature; and for me so far, the contradictions evident in the Jesus : Judas relationship and the Samson : Delilah relationship are only explicable for me by realizing this. The whole thing is an eloquent essay in the Lord's humanity and the depth of His 'in-loveness' with Judas the traitor. And this Lord is our Lord, the same yesterday and today. Our self-knowledge will be deepened by realizing that we too have this spiritual schizophrenia: it's not that we are spiritual one day and unspiritual the next. We are both flesh and spirit at the very same moment. Appreciation of this will help us cope with the more evident failures of our brethren. It doesn't necessarily mean that they must be written off as totally unspiritual and insincere because of acts and attitudes of evident unspirituality. The Spirit is still there, at the very same moment. Think of how Samson slept with a whore until midnight, and then in faith rose up and was granted the Spirit to perform a great act of Christ-like, cross-like victory over the enemies of God's people. Let's note that when the Lord repeats this teaching at the last supper, He mentions only that the faithful will "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk. 22:30). Surely He realized that 'the twelve' were not now all faithful.

Lk. 22:30 speaks of the disciples sitting eating and drinking at the Lord's table, judging the twelve tribes. The suggestion is that the seats at His table somehow turn into thrones of judgment. In this case the idea may be that being in fellowship with the King means that we are co-rulers with Him; His table of fellowship becomes the basis of judgment for the Israel who refused Him and His disciples. Or in another sense, the seats at His table merge into seats of glory and of judgment. If we are at His table now, we shall be rulers in His Kingdom.

*Judging the twelve tribes-* There are many problems in trying to work out the chronology of events at the judgment seat. I suggest they are resolved by understanding that there will be a collapsing of time [and space too, if Einstein's relativity theory is correct] at the day of judgment. This would explain difficulties such as how we and the disciples can come before the judgment throne of glory when we and they are seated there (Mt. 19:28 cp. 25:31); and how the judgment of the world seems (from some Scriptures) to be simultaneous with the judgment of the household.

*The twelve tribes-* The Lord has repeatedly spoken in terms of establishing a new Israel, and so He may have in mind here the tribes of spiritual Israel. In Revelation, the disciples form the foundation stones of the new Jerusalem; the entire edifice of the Christian church was built upon

men who were so weak in faith, understanding and perception. But *krino* [“judging”] can just as well mean ‘condemning’. In this case the Lord’s picture would be of the despised disciples playing a part in the judgment and condemnation of natural Israel who had rejected Christ.

19:29 This list of things to be forsaken recalls the language of the Levites forsaking these things in order to serve God (Ex. 32:26-29; Dt. 33:8-10). The secular disciples again are encouraged to see themselves as the Levites of the new Israel the Lord was creating. Mt. 19:27-30 has a series of extended allusions to the fact that we are now the priesthood. The Lord speaks of how His followers will each have left mother, brother etc. to serve Him, referring to how Moses blessed Levi for forsaking these very things so as to God's service (Dt. 33:9). But He also spoke of how they would forsake houses and lands for His sake and the Gospel's- a reference to the way the Levites resigned their right to physical inheritance in the land for the sake of their relationship with God and the work they were called to. In the same way as Moses predicted that the Levites would be materially blessed even now as a result of their dedication (Dt. 33:11), so the Lord made the same promise. And there is no Christian who has heart and soul committed themselves to the Gospel's work, either in the world or amongst their brethren, who has not lived to see the truth of this definition of priesthood.

Rom. 15:16 speaks of the preacher as offering up his converts upon the altar [note how Acts 11:7 uses the same image of ‘offering up’ sacrifices to describe preaching]. And this connects with how Paul had earlier spoken in Rom. 12:1 of offering ourselves as living sacrifices in dedication. The aim of the preacher, therefore, is to provoke a sacrificial life in his or her converts, after the pattern of the Master whom they learn of. When we read of ‘ministering’ in the NT, we are to generally perceive an allusion to the spirit of priesthood; for it was the OT priests who were understood as “ministers”. Paul speaks of preaching God's word, both in the world and to brethren and sisters, as ministering (Col. 1:23,25; 1 Cor. 9:13). He saw himself as a minister of the Gospel "that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable" (Rom. 15:16). This is priestly language. Paul saw his efforts for others as preparing a sacrifice. He says that we are *all* ministers (cp. priests) of God, stewards of the true Gospel, and should act appropriately (1 Cor. 4:1). Others gave money to poorer brethren, and again this is described as ministering, priest-ing (Rom. 15:27; Heb. 6:10). Reminding brethren of basic doctrines they already know is another kind of ministering (1 Tim. 4:16). Indeed, Peter says that we *each* have something to minister to each other, there is some way in which we can each serve each other (1 Pet. 4:10,11). We must bear one another's burden, as the priesthood bore the burden of Israel's iniquity (Num. 18:1,23). This is the meaning of priesthood. Paul speaks of his preaching work as offering up the Gentiles, as if he is a priest (Rom. 15:16)- and in the same figure, Peter is encouraged to preach to Gentiles by killing and eating animals in a peace offering (Acts 11:7). The command that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel is referring back to how the priests had no material inheritance but lived off the sacrifices (Num. 18:11). And for us, the honour and wonder of

preaching Christ should mean that we keep a loose hold on the material things of this life. And as we are *all* priests, we are all preachers.

*Or wife-* It is perhaps significant, given the theme of ‘following’ in the records of Peter, that he became well known for ‘leading about’ his wife (1 Cor. 9:5), as if she followed him everywhere. Peter translated the principles of following Christ into domestic life. There was a time when he may well have ‘forsaken’ his wife in order to follow Christ (Mt. 19:27-29). But further down that path of following he came to see that as he was to follow his Lord to the end, so he was to be as the self-crucifying Christ to her, and lead her in her following of him that she might follow Christ.

*For My Name’s sake-* “The kingdom of God’s sake” (Lk. 18:29) is paralleled with the sake of the Name of Christ by the account here in Mt. 19:29. The things of the Name and the things of the Kingdom were therefore not two different things, rather were they different ways of referring to the same realities.

*Shall receive an hundredfold-* The Lord’s prophecy that the believer receives fathers, mothers, houses, lands etc. only has its fulfillment insofar as the ecclesia is willing to share these things and relationships with its members. But the condition of the fulfillment was not explicitly stated. We forsake all human relationships to follow the Lord Jesus (Mt. 19:27-29). And He promises to compensate for this even in this life. But it depends to what extent we are willing to accept and perceive it. Through meaningful fellowship with our brethren we will find those relationships which we have given up compensated for, even if we aren’t physically close to our brethren. In reference to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt we read: “God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains” (Ps. 68:6). To be set in a new family is paralleled with being brought out from slavery. Part of the process of our redemption is that we are set in a new ecclesial family. This must be a reference to how Israel were brought out on Passover night, where the families and lonely ones had to join together into households big enough to kill a lamb for. The implication of Ps. 68 could be that it was in these family groups that they travelled through the wilderness. The N.C.V. reads: “God is in his holy Temple. He is a father to orphans, and he defends the widows. God gives the lonely a home. He leads prisoners out with joy...”. The very house / family of God becomes the house / family of the lonely. Hence the ecclesia *is* the house of God (1 Cor. 3:16). We find true family in the new family of God. By baptism we are “added together” with those others who are likewise saved in Christ (Acts 2:47 RVmg.). We will live together eternally with the other members of this new body and community which we enter. The links between us within that new family are even stronger than those with our natural family; and hence any division amongst the family of God is the greatest

tragedy. What this means in practice is that we must fellowship each other. Even if we are isolated from other believers, one can always write letters, make phone calls, invite others to visit them, attempt to meet others...

*Inherit eternal life-* The very words of the rich young man (Mk. 10:17). The answer to that man's question was that we have to lose now, if we are to win eternally; we must forsake material things if we are to inherit the life eternal. As he was only a young man, it's likely that his wealth had been inherited. He was being told that the greatest inheritance was of life eternal, but this didn't come easily nor by good luck or circumstance, but in response to a lifetime of following Jesus. The things which were to be forsaken include [putting the records in Mark and Luke together with Matthew]: family, brothers, sisters, father, mother, lands, houses etc. These were all the things which the young man had received by inheritance, and to forsake association with his family, on behalf of whom he had received his wealth, would've been crazy and social suicide. It was as crazy as trashing a winning lottery ticket and walking away the same you were before you bought it. But this is the radical calling of those who must forsake materialism in order to inherit eternity. Therefore all seeking for material advantage in this life is surely inappropriate if in fact we are to forsake it even if it comes to us without our seeking it.

19:30 *Many that are first shall be last-* The context is of the Lord having taught that a rich man *must* shed his wealth in order to enter the Kingdom, *but* God's grace is such that He is prepared to save the rich who *don't* do that. With God this is "possible". Chapters 18 and 19 have demonstrated the idea of living on different levels. The Lord had told the rich young man that if he "would be perfect", then he should sell all he had and give it to the poor. In this amazing comment at the conclusion of the section, we learn that in fact "many" who are first in this life *and choose to remain first* shall still be saved, although they will be "last" in the Kingdom. The same word for "last" is used in the parable which speaks of believers having to take the "last" or 'lowest' place around the Lord's table (Lk. 14:9,10). There are and will be gradations between the Lord's people, both now and eternally. Those who are "first" in this brief life, retaining their wealth when they should not, shall be saved by grace but will be the least in the Kingdom. Whereas those who are the least in this life, or make themselves the least, will become the first in God's Kingdom.