

# TWO DANGERS DISCIPLES MUST AVOID

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*By the Book*™ A Chapter by  
Chapter Bible Study Series  
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## Let's Begin

*It's often stated that while following Christ is the most satisfying journey a person can have in this life—and certainly the next—it is not the easiest road to travel. With Jesus at the wheel, sometimes He goes much faster than we'd like. On the other hand, we wonder why He goes so slowly when, for us, the road seems so straight. At times, we even become frustrated enough to attempt a takeover of the driver's seat. Yet, as experienced disciples know, we must follow Him, not lead Him. After all, that's what disciples of Jesus are: followers of Jesus.*

*But while most believers understand our journey is difficult, fewer understand our journey is also dangerous. **Living with Jesus and living for Jesus is a dangerous lifestyle every disciple must learn sooner or later.** The Bible is jam-packed with dangers about which every must be aware. Matthew 19 outlines two dangers that may, if possible, serve as the worst of the worst. These twin dangers not only threaten to damage us as we journey with Christ, but also are deadly with the potential to ruin our Christian witness. As we study chapter nineteen this week, note the following outline:*

**I. The Danger of Sexual Lust:  
Divorce (vv. 1-15)**

**II. The Danger of Selfish Lifestyle:  
Destruction (vv. 16-52)**

## I. The Danger of Sexual Lust: Divorce (vv. 1-15)

Divorce is the number one problem of the American family. The oft repeated tragedy that approximately one half of all marriages end in divorce still remains frightening. In some places there are more divorces than marriages!

Obviously the standard in America for marriage is not what the Bible says about marriage. Even so, if we can believe the numbers, the number of Christians who divorce compared to the number of non-Christians who divorce is very similar. This is simply frightening.

It's not hard to discern God's view of divorce. According to Malachi, the Lord says, "I hate divorce" (2:16). Also, we must admit that there's rarely a subject which is pursued which is more capable of provoking controversy than divorce. And the views are often polarized.

On the one hand there are those who are very permissive. Marriage is not viewed as a permanent bond. There is no sacred aspect to it. Instead, it's just a fact of life. People fall in and out of love. Therefore, divorce is no big thing. Why should anyone be expected to continue in a relationship which produces no pleasure? The conclusion is clear: the only right thing to do is to divorce. On the other hand, there is the harsh approach which recognizes nothing as being a legitimate reason to allow the pursuit of a valid divorce.

Today, we're going to examine neither of these views. Rather we're going to look to the Lord Jesus to understand what He has to say. As we unpack the words of Jesus, there are *two principles* that are easily discernable.

*The first principle we observe is the Original Pattern Principle (vv. 1-6). Carefully note the context in which the view of Jesus on divorce is couched. The Pharisees came to Jesus "tempting Him, and saying unto Him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" (v. 3). Their purpose was to trick Him, not to be taught by Him. The Pharisees hardly cared for the views of Jesus on any subject.*

What's not stated here but we learn from reliable sources concerning the Pharisees is that there were primarily two schools or "traditions" within the Pharisaic community. One was called "Shammai" named

### Reflection Connection

*Why do you think that there are almost as many family problems in the church as outside the church? Explain. What can your group do to assist a family struggling with break-up?*



after the famous Rabbi whose name the tradition bore. The other school was also named after a famous Rabbi—"Hillel."

Predictably, each school possessed a particular view of divorce. The "Shammi" school taught that there was only one reason divorce became an option—*infidelity*. On the other hand, "Hillel" taught that divorce could be pursued for *virtually any reason* whatsoever. If a man's wife burnt the toast, according to Hillel, he could issue her a bill of divorcement.

### Reflection Connection

*Do our laws protect the family or place obstacles in the way of strong family relationships? If there are obstacles, name some. Do you think that "gay marriage" is more acceptable today than ten years ago? What are some possible effects if "gay marriage" becomes legalized?*

Jesus sweeps aside the "schools" of the Rabbis and appeals to the Bible. This is one reason Jesus was often perceived as having authority. He ever spoke from the Word of God. Here is where a Christian can never fail. No matter the moral dilemma, unless one's position is based upon the Word of God, it must be swept aside.

Thus, Jesus goes back to the original intent when God made man and woman (vv. 4-5; cp. Genesis 1:27, 2:24). For Jesus, the key to solving the divorce problem is to solve the marriage problem. The passage to which Jesus referred reveals God's plans for the first couple.

First, it reveals how the couple was *made* (v. 4). God created them! Also, He created them as they were with different roles and different needs. Second, Jesus revealed how the couple was *married* (v. 5). Jesus quoted Genesis' focus on "leave" and "cleave". The couple leaves the confines of protection and creates an entirely new family entity. The third truth Jesus reveals is how the couple *merged* (vv. 5-6). The two become one.

Thus, the original intent of marriage is clearly revealed: *one man for one woman for life*. To make sure that the sacredness of marriage was clear, Jesus said, "What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" (v.6).

*The second principle we discern is the Continual Problem Principle* (vv. 7-9). This is the shift from the ideal to the actual. One wonders why divorce was even on God's radar screen. The Pharisees inquired: "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement and to put her away?" (v.7; cp. Deuteronomy 24:1). Jesus answered by telling them, first of all, it's a *spiritual problem* (vv. 7-8). The basic cause of divorce is the "hardness of the human heart." The hardened heart is a heart determined to have its own way. In fact, most marital problems can be traced to someone insisting they have their own way.

When Moses faced the conditions of sinful, selfish hearts, he handled it as best he could. He recognized divorce as a reality and put guidelines in place to regulate divorce, not to recommend it. Divorce was not the divine intention. It really was, in a sense, God bending over backwards to accommodate the sinfulness of man. Rather than obliterate him with justice for failing to make the ideal, He offered him mercy out of sheer love for him.

In addition, it was not only a *spiritual problem* of a hardened heart but a *moral problem* of an unholy conscious (v. 9). Absolutely no divorce is God's ideal. Yet the ideal can be broken. The one who sins is the one who breaks the ideal.

Jesus then reveals one of the most luring dangers every couple faces—*the danger of sexually charged attraction*. He says: "And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (v. 9).

### Reflection Connection

*If Moses allowed for divorce in the Old Testament, why is divorce not acceptable now?*



How presumptuous so many are toward the danger of sexual lust, not realizing the power it possesses. Yet, when given in to, *this sin becomes the only one Jesus mentions which breaks the bonds that God originally intended*. Understand: it is not that divorce *must* be pursued if adultery takes place. Rather, Jesus is saying that divorce *may* be pursued because the bond God intended for sacred marriage has been breached. That's how serious the sin of sexual adultery is. While God Himself states "I hate divorce" here is something God even hates more—adultery. In fact, He hates it so much that Jesus made an exception to the marital ideal based upon the treacherous act. The dangerous power it possesses shreds the family apart. Unbridled sexual lust leads to divorce.

### Reflection Connection

*Is it ever right to give counsel for divorce? Why do some say that there exists absolutely no exceptions—divorce is not an option whatsoever—even when Jesus seems to make an exception for adultery?*

Jesus ends this section applying the principles He'd uttered to the Pharisees to the disciples (vv. 10-15). While they did not fully understand, Jesus gave them two illustrations to assist them: "eunuchs" (vv. 10-12) and "little children (vv. 13-15). In the ancient world, eunuchs were men who were, by nature, incapable of marrying and having children (According to Jesus, however, some "made themselves eunuchs"). Our Lord corrected the disciples' false conclusion that it would be better not to marry by appealing to the special case of the eunuch. The way to avoid the power of lust cannot be controlled by outward means.

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In fact, Jesus used the drama of the child sitting in His lap to illustrate from whence real victory flows: "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (v. 14). The humble dependence of a little child breaks the chain of sexual lust (cp. 18:1-3).

## II. The Danger of Selfish Lifestyle: Destruction (vv. 16-52)

### Reflection Connection

*What do you think Jesus thought about singleness? How is Jesus' view different from the average person's view today? How well do you think the church ministers to singles?*

One of the most familiar passages in the gospels is the encounter Jesus experienced with the rich young man (vv. 16-22). Amazing contrasts are revealed between this world and the next. Some may have a lot of material possessions now but in eternity have nothing. Or in contrast, some may have nothing now and in eternity have riches untold. One can have earthly position and no heavenly glory and have heavenly glory then but no earthly position.

*First, let's take a moment and briefly profile the man (v. 16). We easily gather he was a young man on a quest. This could fit the profile of so many young people. This young man is the perfect model for them. We're told repeatedly that the best time to come to Christ is at a young age. Not only is the heart tender toward the things of God, but also one has more of his life to give to Jesus.*

Also, this young man was very *wealthy*. He was packing "great possessions" (v. 22). He was on the fast track, a high roller, if you will.

Another trait in this man's profile is that he was *religious*. He wasn't an immoral man. In fact, he had many moral attributes and accomplishments. How many people do you know who fit this man's profile? Good people, religious people, and moral people but people who do not know Jesus.



One last trait that makes this man's profile complete: *searching*. This young man had everything one could want in this life. Yet tragically he did not have life itself. He possessed a deep sense of emptiness. He had a spiritual itch that no amount of scratching could satisfy. We have the idea that money can purchase just about anything. In one sense, that is correct. Money can buy the best beds in the world. Money can buy the finest foods available. Money can purchase the most advanced medicines. Money buys diamonds and rubies. But money can't buy sleep even if it bought you the bed, or appetite even if you have the food, or health even if you gain the medicine, or love even if you possess the jewels.

Let's now note this young man whose quest led him to ask a *particular question*: "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (v. 16). There is no doubt about it, this man was on the right track, and he was asking the right question. Too many times we do not ask the right questions. Where Cain got his wife is a good question. But the question this young man asks is by far the greater.

### Reflection Connection

*Name some significant things money cannot buy? Since money is both a necessity and a snare, how can we balance the two so that we will not be entrapped by money's powerful enticement? Explain.*

That was really quite an admission he was making. All of the wealth he possessed did not give him the answers he'd longed to know. He wanted to know the deeper things of God. Yet, for all the qualities concerning the question, it was unfortunately flawed. Two words expose the error—"I do." There is no "I do" in salvation. We do not add anything to what Jesus does. The old song we used to sing really does have it right: "*Jesus Paid It All*."

Now that we've observed this young man, *let's look at the Master* (vv. 17-21). Jesus opened with an investigation of His own: "Why callest thou me good?" (v. 17). That was like a pan of cold water in the young man's face! Why? Jesus wanted him to search his heart. Unfortunately, the boy was self-deceived into thinking he had perfectly kept the commandments. Afterwards, Jesus offered the young man an invitation to follow Him (v. 21). Mark brings out that Jesus "beholding him loved him" (Mark 10:21). What an incredible testimony about the compassion of Jesus for this young man. "Beholding" is a word that means "to fix upon." Jesus gazed into the boy's soul and was moved with compassion. If this young man ended up in hell, it was not because Jesus did not love him. We can be assured the same is true for everyone else.

Jesus brought out the one thing the boy lacked: "The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me" (vv. 21-22). There was one missing file in the boy's record—what was he willing to do with Jesus? That will be the absolute bottom line that always comes up. What we do with Jesus determines our status as saved or unsaved. Jesus told him to "come follow me." Was he willing?

Finally, we get to the *mistake* (v. 22). We've noted the *man*, the *Master* and now the *mistake*. The struggle is obvious. He is remorseful; his sorrow is visible. Mark says the boy was "sad" (10:22). But for all his remorse and sadness, the boy turns and walks away. Why? As he thought about everything, his lifestyle got the best of him. He "had great possessions." This man could not come to placing his possessions under the Lordship of Christ.

### Reflection Connection

*Reflect on a time in your life when things took precedent over following Jesus. If possible share with the group. Or, allow another to share.*



### Reflection Connection

*Do you think the boy actually did keep all the commandments from his childhood? It's easy to say we'll give all up; it's another thing entirely to actually do it. What are some things that would really be hard to forfeit in order to follow Jesus?*

Lifestyle may send more people to hell than anything else. The uncontrolled lust Jesus talked about in the first part of the chapter led to the demise of a marriage—divorce. Here the unchecked lifestyle of the rich led to the destruction of a human soul. Jesus said that Camels can go through needles' eyes before rich people can go to heaven (v. 25).

This encounter with the young ruler got the disciples thinking heavily about their own commitment, sparking in Peter a need to rehearse what they'd given up to follow Jesus (vv. 26-31). Again Jesus told them of His impending death that awaited Him in Jerusalem (vv. 32-34), which spawned a discussion once again of the disciples' role in the coming Kingdom (vv. 35-44).

Finally, we see Jesus calling others to follow Him even after the young ruler turned Him down flat (vv. 45-52). Nothing could keep the Son of God from sharing how people could enter the Kingdom of God.

### Golden Greek Nugget

The term Jesus used in verse five to describe the marriage bond that takes place when a man leaves home is "cleave." Interestingly, the word literally means "glue" or in the passive sense which is used here it means "to be glued to." What a telling picture of what marriage is—a gluing together of two lives. Moreover, what greater attribute is more needed today in our culture of divorce than couples that are "glued" together?

### Wrap Up

*There is little doubt that two of the greatest dangers facing believers are lust which, if left unhindered, will inevitably lead to a breach in the sacred vows of marriage and lifestyle which twists a person's values and ends in destruction if not addressed. Jesus dealt with both of these dangers. Only the Son of God can deliver us from both.*

