

In Matthew 19 the Pharisees ask Jesus if it is lawful for a husband to divorce his wife for any cause. The answer would appear to be given in this chapter. Verse 1 says that if a man finds an “indecency” in his wife he can write a certificate and send her away.

What constitutes indecency is not strictly defined. So, because of the hardness of men’s hearts (Matthew 19:8), it was usually interpreted that a wife who disappointed her husband in any way could be divorced. The most common reason this happened in ancient times was failure to conceive and bear children. Some men valued their wives mainly for their fertility.

1 Samuel gives us an endearing counter example to this hard hearted attitude. Elkanah’s wife Hannah has been unable to have children. Elkanah does have children through his second wife but does not cease to love Hannah. “On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he

would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb” (1 Samuel 1:4-5).

One lesson we can take from this is God’s relation to His people Israel. Today it is the church who is bearing fruit for Him, “bringing many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10). But He has not ceased to love Israel and one day she will produce fruit for Him, just as Hannah later gave birth to Samuel.

Another analogy might be Christ and the church. The Lord has prepared good works for us to do and greatly desires us to serve Him. But does He love us merely for our usefulness to Him, or does He love us for ourselves as Elkanah loved Hannah? If for ourselves, should we be content with that or should we pray as Hannah did that we might bear fruit for Him?

Questions:

1. What is allowed and what is prohibited in the laws on divorce?
2. How is the Lord’s kindness displayed in this chapter? Is kindness different than mercy?

3. How are the people told here to guard the dignity of their fellow Israelites? How might this apply to us?
4. The law says not to take a millstone as collateral for debt, or keep a cloak overnight. Why? What might be a lesson for us?
5. How might verses 19-22 be applied in today's society?