

# CHURCH OF GOD PUBLICATIONS

## #DiscipleshipTuesday



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March 2019 free lesson

# Ethical Issues, Part 1

Matthew 19:3-12; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16; 29-31;  
1 Timothy 2:1-4; 6:6-9, 17-19; 1 John 2:15-17

## Unit Theme:

Christian Ethics

## Central Truth:

Christians must depend on God's Word for answers to ethical issues.

## Focus:

Explore critical ethical issues and commit to biblical standards.

## Context:

New Testament passages concerning divorce and remarriage, Christians and government, worldliness and materialism

## Golden Text:

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:8).

## Study Outline:

- I. Divorce and Remarriage  
(Matt. 19:3-9;  
1 Cor. 7:10-16)
- II. Christians and Government  
(Rom. 13:1-7;  
1 Tim. 2:1-4)
- III. Worldliness and Materialism  
(1 John 2:15-17;  
1 Tim. 6:6-9,17-19)

## INTRODUCTION

This is the first of two lessons dealing with critical ethical issues. The overarching issue facing believers continues to be, Will we stubbornly cling to our personal views or will we commit to biblical standards? Will we follow the absolute principles of the Word of God or be tempted to devise our own guidelines as we are influenced by culture?

The teacher leading these lesson discussions will need to use wisdom, coupled with a firm commitment to the Word in the face of some strong opinions. The purpose of these lessons is for Christians to discuss vital ethical issues. We have an obligation to be conversant on each of the selected topics.

Each of the subjects to be discussed could be a separate lesson in itself. A teacher could take one of two approaches. One is to review each of the topics, hitting the major items, and then discuss them in-depth at another setting. A second approach is to select one topic and discuss it thoroughly; then cover the other two in another setting.

The subject of *divorce and remarriage* will probably attract the most attention. It is a subject on which many individual believers, denominations, and local churches have shifted opinion as divorce becomes more prevalent among believers. It is critical that the Church not simply follow society but instead carefully study what the Bible states and operate within those guidelines.

*Christians and government* continues to be an ongoing concern. Here we deal with the centuries-old issue of church and state. In the United States we are faced with what the separation of church and state means. It becomes of greater concern as we see further encroachments in the freedom of Christian influences in many areas.

Then there is the ongoing struggle with *worldliness and materialism*—the struggle with secular thought and its promotion of satisfying self through personal indulgence and accumulation of wealth. Those of us within Pentecostalism share a common concern as a decline in holiness seems to pervade.

It is hoped the discussions in this lesson will provoke further study and discussion.

I. DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE (Matt. 19:3-9; 1 Cor. 7:10-16)

A. The Union of Marriage (Matt. 19:3-6)

**3. The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?**

**4. And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,**

**5. And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?**

**6. Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.**

Large crowds are following Jesus. As seen on other occasions, Jesus is healing those who are brought to Him. Within this setting some Pharisees, following their usual pattern of seeking to trap Jesus, ask Him a broad question on divorce: Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason? The framing of this question points to divorce brought only at the option of the male in the marriage.

Jesus doesn't become embroiled in the breadth of their question. Instead, He goes right to the point by turning them immediately to the Scriptures. Surely they have read the Genesis account of Creation. Of course they have. Jesus is putting the Scriptures in the forefront. The Pharisees are pointed to God's making two genders and uniting them as one. Jesus' reference to a man's leaving his father and mother is quite interesting, since in Oriental society a woman always left her family and lived with her husband's family. Thus, Jesus is not pointing to a physical separation but an emotional one. The man's wife is to take priority. They have been joined physically and emotionally. God's joining them together is intended to be permanent. His plan isn't for human laws to separate this divine union.

Marriage is not intended to be a contractual agreement with a designated time period such as five or ten years. This bond also is not to be seen as dependent on each partner always being happy with the actions of the other. Nor is it dependent on the health of one's spouse. "Until death do us part" is a marriage vow based on God's Word.

B. The Issue of Divorce (vv. 7-9)

**7. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?**

**8. He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.**

**9. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another,**

**Talk About It:**

1. What was the purpose of the Pharisees' question (v. 3)?
2. How does God view the marriage relationship (vv. 4-5)?
3. What is God's will for married couples (v. 6)?

"You can never be happily married to another until you get a divorce from yourself. Successful marriage demands a certain death to self."

—Jerry McCant

**Talk About It:**

1. What brought about divorce in Moses' day (vv. 7-8)?
2. What does Jesus declare about divorce (v. 9)?

**committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.**

Is divorce ever justifiable? The Pharisees point out to Jesus how Moses allowed divorce. Probably fueling this response was the difference of opinion among two schools of the Jews. The school of Shammai held to adultery being the only reason for a man divorcing his wife. In complete contrast, the school of Hillel taught there were many reasons for a divorce based on a wife's not being pleasing to her husband.

Jesus briefly explains that divorce was allowed in Moses' day "because of the hardness of your hearts" (v. 8). It doesn't negate the initial "Adam and Eve" concept of one man being married to one woman. "Hardness of heart" might have been an allowance given for the safety of the wife and children rather than being subjected to the cruelty of the husband/father. Matthew Henry writes:

Jesus allows divorce, in case of adultery; the reason of the law against divorce being this, "They two shall become one flesh" (v. 5). . . . By the law of Moses adultery was punished with death (Deut. 22:22). Now our Savior mitigates the rigor of that, and appoints divorce to be the penalty.

He disallows [divorce] in all other cases: "Whosoever puts away his wife, except for fornication, and marries another commits adultery" (Matt. 19:9). This is a direct answer to their query, that it is not lawful. . . . The law of Moses allowing divorce for the hardness of men's hearts, and the law of Christ forbidding it, intimate that Christians being under a dispensation of love and liberty, tenderness of heart may justly be expected among them, that they will not be hard-hearted.

When God instituted marriage, He was well aware of the created differences of male and female. He knew some of those differences would create conflict, even in the process of finding fulfillment in marriage. Differences are to be resolved in union rather than in separation by divorce. This reality of commitment to the union of marriage for the lifetime of the couple isn't to be taken as a reason for never marrying. To not marry or to easily succumb to the option of divorce can be seen as yielding to one's selfish desires.

C. The Believer/Unbeliever Marriage (1 Cor. 7:10-16)

**10. And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband:**

**11. But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.**

**12. But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.**

**13. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.**

"They divorce in order to remarry. They remarry in order to divorce."

—**Seneca, first-century Roman philosopher**

**14. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.**

**15. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.**

**16. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?**

This passage begins with directives to married individuals where both are believers (vv. 10-11). When difficulties occur other than infidelity, either the husband or the wife may consider divorce. Paul simply states that if this route is chosen, they are to remain unmarried. He then turns to the situation of a mixed marriage in terms of believer and unbeliever.

Throughout the history of the Church there have been examples of one spouse in a marriage becoming a believer and the other remaining an unbeliever. Is this new faith difference a reason for divorce? Paul says no. There is the possibility of the unbeliever being led to faith in the future. However, if one spouse becoming a believer causes such a rift that the unbeliever decides to leave, then divorce is acceptable. In this situation a second marriage is neither forbidden nor considered adulterous.

This teaching is not for the believer who enters into marriage knowing the spouse is unsaved. Also, the concept of the unbelieving spouse being “sanctified” (v. 14) doesn’t mean he or she becomes holy. But rather, when an unbeliever and believer choose to remain in union, the unbeliever “is ‘set apart’ to a position of privilege,” writes Paul R. VanGorder. “He or she is in a relationship with a believing mate that may ultimately lead into his or her salvation” (*The Church Stands Corrected*). The children of such a union are likewise in a privileged position through the status of their believing parent.

II. CHRISTIANS AND GOVERNMENT (Rom. 13:1-7;  
1 Tim. 2:1-4)

A. Our Responsibility to Government (Rom. 13:1-7)  
(Romans 13:2, 6 is not included in the printed text.)

**1. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.**

**3. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:**

**4. For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.**

**Talk About It:**

1. What instructions are given to the Christian wife in verses 10 and 11?
2. If a Christian is married to an unbeliever, what should the Christian do (vv. 12-13)?
3. What effect can a Christian have on their unbelieving spouse (vv. 14, 16)?

“Too often Christ is not invited to the wedding and finds no room in the home.”

—Donald T. Kauffman

**Talk About It:**

1. How should we view governmental authority (v. 1)?
2. What is the danger of rejecting authority (vv. 2-4)?
3. What should motivate us to live as law-abiding citizens (v. 5)?
4. What is the principle in verse 7?

“Have respect for authority. Jesus was under the authority of the Father in heaven.”

—Billy Graham

**5. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.**

**7. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.**

This section of the lesson pushes us to consider our ethical obligations to the government structure of the country in which we live. Keep in mind these verses are written to believers living in the capital city of the Roman Empire. The fallacies of the upper echelons of leadership are possibly known to them. Yet, the inadequacies of leaders do not provide an ethical escape from Christians’ moral and civic obligations.

Let’s consider the specific principles found here. First, government and its various officials are instituted by God. These individuals are to be His instruments for maintaining order and punishing evildoers. Many do not live up to the full expectations, but it doesn’t negate their purpose. Consider the chaos that would result with no governmental structure.

Second, no person is exempt from the ruling authorities of the territory in which he or she resides. For example, not agreeing with the government’s actions does not free us from paying the required taxes. At times a tension arises between what loyalty to Christ demands and what a governmental authority demands. This is seen when Peter and John are commanded “not to speak. . . nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). Later, after being imprisoned for continuing to preach and then miraculously being released, they begin their defense to the authorities with, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (5:29). Disobedience to the government directive is acceptable only when it conflicts with loyalty to Christ.

Third, we have an obligation to honor individuals for the position of their office, even if we are in total disagreement with their methodology or personal lifestyle. We are to respect the title, uniform, or badge due to their being a symbol of God-ordained structure and order. At times this is difficult to do, but we are given no ethical option.

Fourth, obedience to the government authorities should not stem from a fear of the consequences if we disobey. It is to rise out of a good conscience seeking to be found acceptable in the sight of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**B. Our Responsibility to Rulers (1 Tim. 2:1-4)**

**1. I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;**

**2. For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.**

**3. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;**

#### 4. Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

When it comes to governmental authorities, it appears we believers have a tendency to complain or to bemoan the actions of authority figures. Why do we easily neglect to pray for them, which Paul urges of believers to do? It is to be more than general “God bless them” praying. Instead, Paul encourages us to be involved in specific, intimate praying for “all men” (v. 1), which includes government leaders.

Verse 2 provides a distinct reason for Christians to include government leaders. Through our praying for them to rule wisely, we are seeking the positive impact of being able to live in peace. Keep in mind many of the believers of the early church had witnessed Jesus’ murder by the Roman government. And the Jewish population in general harbored thoughts of overthrowing the yoke of Rome in the hope of Jewish nationalism. Not too many years after Paul wrote this epistle to the Roman church, the Jews in Palestine revolted, only to see the might of the Roman army crush them and destroy their Temple (AD 70).

A specific aspect of our praying for authorities is for their coming to know Jesus as Savior and Lord. Not only will this have eternal consequences for their souls, but it will bring immediate impact for those under their rule. This spiritual dimension is often overlooked. We may pray for their administrative actions and forget the major dimension—personal salvation. This praying should include those of political philosophies other than our own!

III. WORLDLINESS AND MATERIALISM (1 John 2:15-17; 1 Tim. 6:6-9, 17-19)

A. Foundational Principle (1 John 2:15-17)

**15. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**

**16. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.**

**17. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.**

Living in a secular society which emphasizes relativism and personal pleasure can easily influence believers toward unethical positions of thought and actions. An overemphasis on success, which most frequently finds definition in terms of position, salary, and possessions, is also easily detrimental.

These verses from 1 John remind us of a vital foundational principle. Our lives on Planet Earth are temporary, short spans of time. However, in the process of living we can become so involved in the practices and philosophies of this secular world

#### Talk About It:

1. What is “good and acceptable [to] God” (vv. 1-3)?
2. What is God’s will for everyone (v. 4)?

“Extensive experience has convinced me that the vast majority of professing Christians never give any serious consideration to ‘the government’ as a serious topic of prayer. Not merely do they not pray for the government ‘first,’ they scarcely pray for it at all!”

—Derek Prince

#### Talk About It:

1. What must we “love not,” and why (v. 15)?
2. How does verse 16 describe “the world”?
3. What comparison is made in verse 17?

“A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone.”

—Henry David Thoreau

**Talk About It:**

1. What is “great gain” (v. 6)?
2. What is “certain” (v. 7)?
3. What do verses 8 and 9 teach about materialism?

“Hetty Green was possibly America’s greatest miser. She died in 1915, leaving an estate valued at over one million dollars, but always ate cold oatmeal because it cost too much to heat it. Her son had to suffer through a leg amputation unnecessarily because Hetty wasted so much time looking for a free clinic that he wasn’t examined early enough.”

—Michael P. Green,  
*Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*

that we forget our spiritual citizenship which is not of this world. We can easily fall prey to “the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does” (v. 16, NIV)—thereby shifting our priorities from Christ to our selfish personal lives.

Common sense tells us not to sacrifice the eternal for the temporal. However, this struggle with the world emphasizes the power of sinful pleasure and the desire for possessions which can blind us to truth.

B. An Attitude of Contentment (1 Tim. 6:6-9)

**6. But godliness with contentment is great gain.**

**7. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.**

**8. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.**

**9. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.**

Material possessions such as land, buildings, and businesses, along with cash, CDs, and mutual funds, are not sinful and destructive in themselves. But one’s attitude toward them can become a destructive virus that doesn’t die easily. People so infected may “think that godliness is a means to financial gain” (v. 5 NIV). However, Paul says “godliness with contentment is great gain” (v. 6). Contentment is not to be seen as ignoring the reality of what others possess and the benefits that come with them. It does mean we understand the value of being provided with the necessities of life and placing a premium on them.

Being able to accumulate material possessions isn’t a sin. Note how many wealthy men who were righteous are recorded in the Old Testament. Abraham and Job are excellent examples. Some Christians are skilled in making money by putting together legitimate business deals. The issue is one’s attitude. When a person becomes consumed with amassing wealth, it can easily erode their integrity. Lying, cheating, and unlawful practices may seem normal and necessary in the pursuit of more money, possessions, and pleasures.

Do you know anyone who is trapped by the pursuit of possessions and pleasures? This can be a process over a period of time until a person becomes so deeply involved that he or she no longer recognizes their true condition. It can lead to actions never once imagined possible due to the driving desire to have more.

C. A Warning to the Rich (vv. 17-19)

**17. Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;**



**18. That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;**

**19. Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.**

These three verses are direct statements to those of considerable financial means in comparison to the general populace. Apparently there were a number of wealthy people in the Ephesian church to warrant these statements. Paul offers two main principles for them to follow.

First, have a proper attitude. The wealthy are to avoid arrogantly seeing their riches as their security. This is a position of uncertainty since wealth can be destroyed, stolen, or spent. Only hope in God is certain.

Second, the wealthy are to be generous with their resources. There is spiritual benefit in giving to those who are less fortunate. First John 3:17 says, "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" (NIV).

Generosity should be a characteristic of all believers. It's amazing how those with lower incomes tend to share more of their income than do those with greater resources. No wonder Paul issues these directives as a command rather than a suggestion.

### CONCLUSION

This lesson covers three ethical issues that are quite different from each other; yet there is a similarity. Specific scriptural guidelines are found for each one. We believers do not have the freedom to develop our own guidelines as it relates to divorce and remarriage, governments, and worldly possessions.

### GOLDEN TEXT CHALLENGE

"HE HATH SHEWED THEE, O MAN, WHAT IS GOOD; AND WHAT DOTH THE LORD REQUIRE OF THEE, BUT TO DO JUSTLY, AND TO LOVE MERCY, AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITH THY GOD?" (Mic. 6:8).

This is one of the most comprehensive statements in the Old Testament. It is Micah's summary of religion. In succinct terms he gives us the minimum of what God requires from us. What He demands is the penitent heart of the individual—toward Him and other people. The "good" that He requires is the doing of His will.

To "do justly" is to act toward God and others according to the divine standard of righteousness revealed in His law. To "love mercy [kindness]" is to show compassion toward others. To "walk humbly" before God is to recognize the absolute holiness of God and to walk in submissive obedience to His will.

### Talk About It:

1. What instructions are given to the materially wealthy (v. 17)?
2. What perspective should a Christian have regarding his wealth (vv. 18-19)?

"Do your giving while you're living, then you're knowing where it's going."

—Anonymous

### Daily Devotions:

- M. God Establishes Marriage  
Genesis 2:18-25
- T. Neither Poverty Nor Riches  
Proverbs 30:7-9
- W. God Is Sovereign  
Daniel 4:13-17, 34-37
- T. Oneness in Marriage  
Mark 10:2-9
- F. Cannot Serve God and Money  
Luke 16:10-15
- S. Submit to Authority  
1 Peter 2:13-17