

## WHAT ABOUT DIVORCE?

Maybe you have heard the story of the man and woman who had been married for over 60 years. They had shared everything except there was one secret in their marriage. The wife had a shoe box in the top of her closet, and she had cautioned her husband never to open it and never to ask about it. He never did. But one day his wife got sick. It was determined that she would not recover. As they began to sort out her affairs, the husband took down the shoe box and took it to his wife. They agreed that it was time that she should explain the box. When he opened it, he found two crocheted dolls and a stack of money totalling \$25,000. He lovingly asked her about the contents. She responded by saying "Just before we got married, my grandmother told me that the secret of a happy marriage was never to argue. She told me that if I ever got angry with you, I should just keep quiet and crochet a doll. The husband was moved to tears, as he looked at the two dolls lying in the box. Only twice in all those years had his darling wife been angry with him. He said, "But what about all this money? How did you manage to save all of this money?" "Oh" she answered, "that is the money I made from selling all the dolls."

The reality is that most of us had no idea what we were getting ourselves into when we got married. We saw the joys but not the challenges that lay ahead. Marriage is hard work. One of the sad realities that we face in the world and even the church today is that not all marriages end well. Today we are continuing our series on Love and Marriage. Last week we looked at God's ideal for marriage. Today I want to look at what happens when things fall apart. I want to address the question "Is it OK to get a divorce? What does the bible have to say about it?"

Mat 19:3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" 4 Haven't you read, he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' ? 6 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." 7 Why then, they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" 8 Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. 9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

### 1. The BASICS of Marriage – what is it?

The Pharisees' came to Jesus and asked Him about divorce. He answers their question by first affirming what marriage is supposed to be and I think that is a great place for us to start as well.

Gen 2:22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." 24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

God created marriage. It was His idea. Marriage is much more than just a commitment or promise or legal agreement between two people. It is a covenant that a man and woman make before God.

What is the difference between a contract and a covenant? In a contract, the two parties remain separate. The party of the first part enters into an agreement with the party of the second part. It is like salad dressing. The oil and water are shaken up and mixed together but they never really become one. Left alone and still, salad dressing will eventually separate back into their original respective parts.

In a covenant, the two become one in the same. The Marriage Covenant is more like mashed potatoes. How do you make mashed potatoes? You take 2 potatoes, skin them alive, cut them up, put them in hot water to soften, and then mash them together into 1!

Why is marriage so important? God created marriage to be a place of security where a man and woman could express their intimacy with one another. In order to have intimacy there must also be safety because insecurity destroys intimacy. You cannot really get close to somebody if there is fear in the relationship. That is why living together outside of marriage does not work in the long run. You never know when someone is going to walk out on you. Promises and agreements can be broken. There must be total commitment. It is only in a situation where you say, "I'm committed to you for life, regardless of whether we always get along or not – we will make this thing work." Then the fear vanishes. This is when real intimacy rises.

Marriage is always for life. You are making a covenant with God to sacrificially love the person you marry no matter what happens; for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health to love and to cherish until you are separated by death. Failure is not an option.

This is what I tell couples when they come to me for premarital counselling. I tell them that failure is not an option. If you are not ready to make the decision to sacrificially love the person you are with for the rest of your life then you should not be getting married. It is a lifetime commitment.

It's like the couple that had been married for 35 years. The wife gave her husband a grapefruit for breakfast every morning. One day, she ran out of grapefruit and apologized passionately to her husband. The husband replied, "That's okay dear. I never liked grapefruit anyway."

I think one of the problems we often face with failed marriages is that people get married for all the wrong reasons. They rush into it and settle for the first person that comes along without really thinking about it. What are the prerequisites of marriage?

2Co 6:14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

Some people take this passage to mean that as long as a person is a Christian, that the person has made some form of commitment to Christ, then they are eligible for marriage. I know of many cases where a believer was dating an unbeliever and, when the Christian told them that they could not get married, the unbeliever 'suddenly' decides to come to Christ. Let's face it ladies, if you tell a guy that he can't have sex with you until he becomes a Christian, that guy will be running down the aisle to make a decision. The problem with this kind of thinking is that these decisions rarely last. Just because someone has made some decision for Christ does not mean that you should necessarily marry them.

When looking for someone to marry you do not grab the first thing that comes your way. You never settle for second best. You look for someone that has the same spiritual depth and direction as you. It is better to never marry than to marry the wrong person.

2. The BREAKERS of Marriage – what destroys it?

Marriage is a covenant we make for life. In an ideal world there would be no such thing as divorce. Unfortunately we do not live in an ideal world.

In order for a marriage to work both members must be willing to do whatever it takes to make the marriage work. As long as there is commitment and a willingness to work out issues then there is hope. As soon as one person decides that they are unwilling to work on it, the marriage is in trouble.

The Pharisees came to Jesus and asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" His answer is basically NO, you should not divorce for ANY and EVERY reason. Jesus goes on to say in his answer to the Pharisees to say, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning." In other words, divorce is a terrible thing but sometimes it is the only solution and should only be a last resort.

Recently there was a movie made called 127 Hours. It was the true life story of a hiker called Aron Ralston. A few years ago he was hiking alone when a boulder fell and pinned him by the arm. For five days he waited for rescue. Facing dehydration and death, he took the incredible decision to use his pocketknife to slowly amputated his own arm, freeing him and allowing him to hike out to safety. Can you imagine doing that? How desperate would you have to be to cut off a member of your own body? Would you turn to that solution quickly, or would you first explore every other possibility? Only when faced with death would a man do such a thing. So should be divorce. It is a desperate act of self-mutilation. It is the amputation of a part of our selves. We should resort to it only in extreme circumstances.

The New Testament gives us two biblical grounds for divorce. The first as seen in this passage we read is through marital unfaithfulness:

Matt 19:9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, *except for marital unfaithfulness*, and marries another woman commits adultery.

Why is adultery grounds for divorce? Adultery breaks the marriage covenant. Any person who would reject their spouse and sleep with another person has broken the safety and security of what their marriage was designed to provide. It is a breach of trust that is very difficult to recover from.

Does this mean that if a person commits adultery then you MUST get a divorce? Absolutely not. Forgiveness and healing is always possible when two people are committed to applying the grace of God to their marriage. Just because divorce may be permissible does not mean that it is always preferable.

In a long term study of couples who were at a point of getting a divorce, 22% of those who went ahead with the divorce reported they were happy 5 years later while 86% of those who decided to stick it out, seek help and counseling to fix their marriage reported they were happy 5 years later.

Marital unfaithfulness is one reason for divorce, but the bible gives another. The second biblical reason given for divorce is if an unbelieving spouse decides to walk away from the marriage.

1Co 7:10 To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. 11 But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. 12 To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.

14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. 15 But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.

Paul gives this instruction for the benefit of the believer. If an unbelieving spouse loves you and is willing to work on their marriage then you should seek to stay with that person and in all ways possible bring Christ into that relationship. This is not saying you should EVER marry an unbeliever, but if a person comes to Christ and their spouse does not then this is what should happen.

However, if the unbelieving spouse is not willing to work on the relationship than it is better for the marriage to end than for the believer continue to suffer and be pulled away from their faith. Just like adultery, I think the issue here is desertion. It takes two people for a marriage to work. God works in our hearts as believers through the prompting and empowering of the Holy Spirit. Without that power, guidance and the framework of grace we have in Christ there is no true marriage covenant.

I would add to this that desertion can also happen when someone is physically abusive or extremely emotionally abusive. Habitual abuse shows that a person is not willing to work on the relationship. Again, it is better that there would be at the very least separation for the abused person than to continue to suffer in the relationship. Abuse of any kind cannot be tolerated, especially in the church. It is illegal and must be immediately reported. If you strike your spouse you should expect to see a police car in your driveway shortly after. Never tolerate abuse.

### 3. The BOUNDARIES of Marriage – what about remarriage?

Jesus finishes his answer to the Pharisees by saying that anyone who causes a divorce and then goes ahead and remarries another person commits adultery.

Mark 10:11 He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. 12 And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

Some have used this passage to say that remarriage is never possible, but that would contradict the passages we have already read. Notice that this passage talks about the person who 'divorces' their spouse, not the one who 'is divorced'. It is the one who gives up and walks away from the marriage that is at fault.

Jesus said that "anyone who divorces his wife, *except for marital unfaithfulness*, and marries another woman commits adultery." This says that someone who is divorced because of their spouse's marital unfaithfulness and remarries does not commit adultery. The boundaries for remarriage are that the person who breaks up the marriage cannot marry again. I feel that the reason for this is that repentance is a lot more than just saying that you are sorry for your sins.

1John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

The word used for confess in the Greek is HOMOLOGEŌ which comes from the 2 words; HOMOU which means TOGETHER and LOGOS which we know means something that is SAID or communicated. Together these words mean agreement or covenant.

When we confess our sins we are agreeing with God about what we have done and the seriousness of our actions.

Confessing is much more than just recognizing that you have blown it. It means that you feel the same way about your sin that God feels about it. You AGREE with God about the seriousness of it. Repentance is not just asking forgiveness but it is setting your heart to never do the same thing again. It is turning around or changing course.

Repenting to God means repenting to the people you hurt as well. It is not simply restoring your relationship with God. It also means seeking out the people you have hurt and try to restore your relationship with them as well.

Mat 5:23 Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

A person who walked out on their marriage through physical desertion or sexual desertion has sinned against their spouse. In giving up on the relationship they have broken a sacred covenant with God and with the person they married. Repenting does not mean you simply say that you are sorry and then move on to the next person. It means you make things right and you seek reconciliation with the person you hurt.

Let me close today by trying to offer some words of encouragement;

If you are here today and you have been divorced then I want to assure you as a church that we love you and value you as a person and we support you. I know that often there is a lot of guilt that is laid on people who get divorced. Often they are made to feel like second class citizens. Whatever has happened in your past I want you to know that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.

Let me say that, while all divorce is the result of sin, it is not necessarily always a sin to get divorced. Joseph was still declared a righteous man for seeking to divorce Mary quietly. He would rather quietly end the marriage than place Mary in a position of public humiliation.

Mat 1:19 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

If you are here today and you are divorced and you know that it was the result of your actions then I would encourage you to be reconciled with your former spouse. I know that in some cases reconciliation is impossible, but that does not mean that you should not try. You cannot move forward without first dealing with what has happened in the past.

Lastly, if you are here today and you are married and you know that your marriage is in trouble than you need to seek help. Don't try to suffer in silence because you think that you will be judged or looked down upon because you are having difficulties.

A man left work one Friday afternoon. But instead of going home, he stayed out the entire weekend fishing with friends from work and spending his entire paycheck. When he finally appeared at home Sunday night, he was confronted by his very angry wife. After yelling at him for hours finally his wife stopped and said to him "How would you like it if you didn't see me for 2 or 3 days?"

To which he replied, "That would be fine with me!" Monday went by and he didn't see his wife. Tuesday went by and he didn't see his wife. Wednesday went by and still he did not see his wife. Finally on Thursday, the swelling had gone down just enough where he could see her a little out of the corner of his left eye.

I do not want to suggest with that little story that beating up on your husband (or wife) is OK. What I mean to say is, don't let it come to that. If your marriage is in trouble then get help. We have a great marriage ministry here at the church. We have couples that are ready and willing to meet with you and help you as a couple work through issues in your marriage. There are excellent resources available.