

#187 “What God Thinks About Divorce”

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We all know what the world thinks about divorce given its prevalence. People moan and groan about its effects on children, yet it continues on recklessly because too often people marry recklessly. People would take who they date and eventually marry so much more seriously if they didn't view divorce as their “ace in the hole” or “bailout.” There is so much distrust in marriage today that many are afraid to make a commitment, or if they do, they call upon a lawyer to draft a prenuptial agreement. So much for God's plan in which “the heart of her husband trusts in her” and vice-versa (Proverbs 31:11). Marriage has degraded into a business proposition, and divorce is merely a contract that is drafted and executed. Yet the truth is that the wounds of distrust and divorce go deep, and God warned us it would be so. This is all the more reason that we must take marriage seriously and view divorce as God does.

Just how does God view divorce? Malachi 2:16 says, “‘For I hate divorce,’ says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘and him who covers his garment with wrong,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.’” God abhors divorce because it is a treacherous treatment of one's spouse and children. God cannot be any clearer about how He views divorce. The question for us is, “How do we view divorce?”

We must come to believe that it is possible to totally trust a person and to be in love “until death do us part.” It can be done, and it has been done. God's plan has always been for the marriage bond to be until death. Romans 7:2-3 says, “For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.” The message is that marriage is a lifelong bond sealed by God that can only be voided upon the death of one's spouse. Even if spouses elect to sign divorce papers and go their own ways, according to this verse the marriage covenant is still in place. It follows, then, that remarrying would constitute adultery. 1 Corinthians 7:39 says, “A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.” God takes divorce seriously because He takes marriage seriously, being unwilling to void the covenant as long as both spouses are living.

This is not to say that God does not allow or permit divorce in certain cases. God allowed Moses to draft certificates of divorce because of the hardness of the hearts of the people of Israel (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). This, however, was never God's desire or will. Jesus says in Matthew 19:8, “He said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.’” Jesus also says in verse 6, “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” We need to recognize that marriage is more than just two people living together. It is a joining of two into one by God Himself. Man

can remove himself from the other person, but he cannot undo what God has joined. However, there will be times that getting a legal divorce is necessary to protect the innocent spouse from the transgressions of the other. Perhaps a spouse is violent or abusive. Perhaps he or she is immoral in terms of committing adultery. If possible, the innocent party should hope that the spouse in the wrong can get his or her life back together. But things may become too dangerous or corrupt that change will be too late. Divorce is then permitted because of the hardness of heart of the sinning party. That doesn't mean God delights in the divorce, for it is a tragedy. However, it may be necessary. Jesus says in Matthew 19:9, "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." So, in the case of immorality, divorce is permitted. But, as the verses referenced earlier indicated, this is not a license to remarry. Matthew 19 is not the only time Jesus speaks on divorce and remarriage. Matthew 5:32 says, "But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." The picture becomes clearer here that marrying a divorced person forces that person to commit adultery, even if the one marrying him or her is single. Mark 10:11-12 says, "And He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.'" Jesus is explicitly clear that remarriage after divorce is adultery because the marriage covenant was never voided by God, though it may have been in the courtroom. Luke 16:18 says, "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery." Paul affirms Jesus' intentions in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, saying, "But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband, (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife." Divorce does not offer a license to remarry. This is yet another reason why we must take divorce seriously and avoid it as much as possible. God hates it because He knows how damaging it is to us. It is impossible to tear apart two people who have been spiritually joined together without damaging them. Marriage is that intimate, and divorce is that horrific.

Now suppose that a person unknowingly has gone ahead and remarried given that remarriage after divorce is common practice in the church today. Should he or she leave the new spouse because such is considered adultery? The answer is a most definite "no." The reason for this is that it would require a second divorce, which God hates. There is no sense in doubling the damage. Rather, let the marriage be done rightly, with honor unto God, and until death. God is a God of grace, after all.

Suppose a person married an unbeliever and then was saved. Or perhaps an individual was saved and yet sinfully chose to marry an unbeliever anyway. In the situation of being unequally yoked (2 Corinthians 6:14), 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 says that this is not grounds for divorce. If the unbeliever is willing to live with the believer, then so be it. The children can still come to know and love Jesus, as the passage indicates. If the unbeliever decides to leave, he or she may go. It does not say that the believer should divorce his or her partner, though it might be necessary in some cases. Either way, the

believer is not free to remarry. He or she can peacefully let the unbeliever go and not feel under bondage to try to save them or bring them back. That is in God's hands.

Thankfully, God does not leave us in the dark concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage. No decision in life outside of choosing Jesus Christ can compare with the significance of deciding to get married. It must not be taken lightly, it must be made prayerfully, and it must be made understanding how God defines a godly spouse and a godly marriage. Marriages can last because of Christ, and this is a great testimony that God wants the world to see. May God lessen divorces among His people as His people begin to view marriage as the permanent, joy-filled bond that marriage is supposed to be.