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## What About Divorce?

**Genesis 2:24: (NKJV) *Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.***

As Christians, we all have a sense of the sanctity of marriage. We all know that it is supposed to be 'til death do us part, yet we also experience about as high a rate of divorce as the rest of our society. Does Jesus give us solid guidelines for marriage and divorce? Should Christians be involved in "no fault" divorces? Do you really have to stay married even if you are not happy? Stay with us as we look into this difficult, sensitive and very relevant matter!

On this program we will discuss a very high standard intended towards Christians. That is not to say the principles are not good for everyone else. If you are a Christian and espouse the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles, then these principles apply to you.

**Let's set the basis for getting our minds right about the whole marriage arrangement:**

**Genesis 2:21-24:** Why did God take a rib? Perhaps because it is close to the man's heart and is protected by his arms. It shows a closeness by which a husband and wife should be operating.

God invented this relationship of marriage with at least two purposes: 1) companionship and 2) procreation. In the marriage arrangement God invented, the children are protected by a mother and a father. Children are educated as they are nurtured and grow.

Marriage is the highest and most sacred relationship that God ever gave to man. **It is so valuable and so sacred, that God saw fit to seal this relationship with a covenant made in His presence:** **Matthew 19:6:** What is God's opinion on divorce? **The following text refers to the sons of Judah, specifically the priests abandoning their Hebrew wives in favor of other foreign and idolatrous women: Malachi 2:11-16:** *<sup>16</sup>For I hate putting away* (Revised Standard Version: "I hate divorce."), *saith Jehovah*

It is very important as Christians that when we read through the Scriptures, we try to get God's mind on things. We are told that God's ways are higher than our ways, so we have to struggle a bit, but God has a reason for everything He does. The closer we get to His attitude, the more we will understand what those reasons are. Marriage is a "Covenant of God," therefore the marriage covenant has *three* parties involved.

(Source: McClintock and Strong's Cyclopedia) **COVENANT OF GOD:** Properly, of a covenant between man and man; i.e. a solemn compact or agreement, either between tribes or nations (1 Samuel 11:1; Joshua 9:6,15), or between individuals (Genesis 21:44), by which each party bound himself to fulfill certain conditions, and was assured of receiving certain advantages. In making such a covenant God was solemnly invoked as witness (Genesis 31:50), whence the expression "a covenant of Jehovah," 1 Samuel 20:8; compare Jeremiah 34:18, 19; Ezekiel 17:19), and an oath was sworn (Genesis 21:31); and accordingly a breach of covenant was regarded as a very heinous sin (Ezekiel 17:12-20).

Theoretically, recognition of God in a marriage arrangement would strengthen that relationship. It should be a factor *against* divorce. Whenever there is conflict in a marriage - and there inevitably will be disagreements - both the husband and wife should remember God was a witness as part of that covenant. It should allow them to be able to resolve that conflict in a way that pleases Him. God is part of that relationship. Statistically, however, the Christian nations have as high a divorce rate as everybody else. That tells us something is wrong somewhere!

The essence of Christianity is sacrifice - giving up your own preferences and comforts so as to do the will of God and be of service to others. That principle works very well in creating a strong marriage bond - giving up what you want so that your partner can have what they want.

**Old Testament definition of divorce: Deuteronomy 24:1-4:** Here are five points of clarity on the above text to affirm it is teaching that divorce is a complete *loosing from* and *breaking of* the marriage contract:

1. *He shall write her a bill of divorcement:* He writes the contract, affirming the dissolving of the covenant in writing which shows its legality and permanence.
2. *Give it in her hand:* This phrase is extremely common in the Old Testament and can depict a giving over of power, responsibility and control. The woman having this written document in



her hand signifies she, not her former husband, has complete power over her life. She has the legal right in her hand to leave.

3. *Send her out of his house*: The contract has been broken in writing; she has its authority in her own hand and now she is sent out of her house.
4. There is a *former husband* and a *latter husband* - both are considered husbands on an equal basis. After receiving a bill of divorcement, she was permitted to enter into a marriage covenant with a second or latter husband.
5. There is potential for defilement and abomination. This sin *could* happen only if the divorced and remarried woman would be, under any circumstances, reunited to the first husband - *may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled*. "Merry go round marriages" were not permitted.

Jeremiah 3:1: In the New Testament, adultery is a key part of divorce. In the Old Testament, adultery and fornication are not mentioned, rather, *an unseemly thing*. They are not mentioned because under the Law the penalty was not simply divorce but a death penalty for such sexual immorality.

**Observation Point:** Thus far, the Law seems clear: Marriage is sacred. Yet for the hardness of man's imperfect hearts, God in the Old Testament did allow divorce and that allowance was a clearly stated and unequivocal dissolution of the marriage covenant.

*Unseemly* is used as a reason for divorce. What does this mean?

(Source: Samuele Bacchiocchi, PhD., Andrews University) The Hebrew word *erwath* (generally translated, "indecent" or "uncleanness") is often used to refer to shameful exposure of the human body (Genesis 9:22,23; Exodus 20:26; Lamentations 1:8; Ezekiel 16:36,37). In Deuteronomy 23:13-14, the word is used to describe the failure to cover human excrement. We would conclude, then, that according to Deuteronomy 24:1, divorce was allowed for some kind of shameful act or indecency other than illicit sexual intercourse.

God often allows things that are not necessarily what He wants. There is God's *intentional* will and *permissive* will. God *allows* divorce, but His *intention* for our ideal spirituality would be to have marriage for life. God will tolerate some things and can potentially bless us *in spite of* what we do vs. God blessing what we do because we are following His will.

Two examples of this:

1. Kings in ancient Israel: God did not want Israel to have kings but God permitted it with all of the problems that went along with a king.
2. God's permission of evil in this world: Some people believe that God's permission of evil means He does not care. That is a mistake. Evil is permitted *for a time* and *for a purpose*.

**ALWAYS LOOK FOR GOD'S INTENTIONAL WILL AND NOT HIS PERMISSIVE WILL.**

We don't want to be a "bottom feeder Christian," getting along with just the bare minimum of what God will tolerate. We are supposed to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Marriage and divorce are subjects of hard-hitting truths to understand.

Matthew 5:27-32: Jesus raised the standard as high as possible! He is telling us not to do the things that will be offensive to God; do not even THINK those things! Assess yourself. This presents a major change from the Old Testament! He wanted the original standard of ONE MAN + ONE WOMAN = ONE LIFE. There is no reason or legitimate cause for divorce except sexual immorality. That was a big change from the legalistic thinking of the Jews at that time.

**Jesus designates his audience and to whom this new standard applies:** Matthew 19:11: (ASV) *But he said unto them, not all men can receive this saying* (those outside of the Christian world), *but they to whom it is given*. Jesus wanted the highest quality of disciple, so a high standard was necessary.

There are situations that are truly intolerable, such as when a spouse's life is threatened. Situations arise where it is a sad but prudent thing to separate. From a biblical Christian standpoint, if there is no other recourse than separation, separation is not a sin. We would highly recommend a divorce not take place. With separation there is a possibility of

reconciliation. Once you have a legal bill of divorcement, you are one step further away from reconciling. Remember, the ideal is that you resolve the conflict.

We are discussing Christian principles. We are not marriage counselors. You must apply the principles in your life as best you can with the help of the Holy Spirit. Make decisions that would be pleasing to God and practical to your spiritual needs.

1 Corinthians 7:10-11: The apostle is here addressing the believers and therefore is repeating what Jesus taught about his marriage preservation standard.

*Yea not I, but the Lord*: Paul made it clear that this was God’s direction.

*That the wife depart not from her husband/The husband leave not his wife*: Don’t leave! But if you do, do not remarry. That marriage bond is still intact even though you are not living under the same roof. Remain unmarried or reconcile. There is a high value placed on reconciling the problem.

There are different interpretations of this verse. Some believe this means just separation, others believe it means divorce. At this point, it is irrelevant...the message is simple: Don’t walk away from each other; find a way back. Let selfless (agape) love flow.

All of us as Christians are seeking to do the will of God. The reward God has for us, as the Apostle Paul says, is we are going to be judges, kings and priests over the earth, reconciling mankind back to God. It comes back to the experiences we have every day. There is no marriage that does not have some issue. Are we using these experiences to grow in our ability to fix and reconcile problems? This is what will qualify us for blessing mankind in the future.

As a Christian, we want what GOD wants, not what WE want. Part of our covenant relationship is giving up what we want. This advice is completely at odds with the teachings of Christ and the Apostles.

One of the themes of our discussion today is the damage divorce does. The teaching from Scripture is there is no excuse for divorce except immorality. (The marriage is also considered dissolved through the death of one spouse.) The practical matter is there are difficulties. A Christian couple is to try to reconcile. There are times when separation is important. During such a “cooling off period,” we should pray to seek what God wants. We want to reflect upon what attracted ourselves to our mate in the first place. We also want to talk - keeping open communication. Don’t divorce; reconcile.

1 Corinthians 7:12-16: What if one spouse is a believer and the other is not? Paul is providing his own sanctified advice for those “unequally yoked.” Just like with a farm implement, when you have two believers pulling in the same direction under equal yoking, they are going in the same direction. You want a yoke that will keep that vision in front of you.

Paul emphasized the great value of staying together. He was preaching a Christian message to a pagan population where one spouse accepted it and the other did not. It must have been a common thing. *Just because your spouse does not accept the Christian message, it does not relieve you of your marital obligations.* You should stay together, care for that spouse and provide all of the responsibilities of marriage just as though they were believers.

The Apostle Paul did not override what Jesus taught; he added to it to incorporate another scenario on which Jesus did not specifically comment.

### **ONE OF THE WAYS WE CAN AVOID PROBLEMS IN OUR MARRIAGE IS TO MAKE SURE WE MARRY IN THE LORD.**

This will minimize problems coming from that direction.

Is divorce a sin? Not if under circumstances of adultery. What if you already divorced and regret it? There are differences of opinion regarding complications that arise after Christians do what they shouldn’t do, i.e., in the case of children and remarriage. At a minimum, you should resolve to stay unmarried and ask for forgiveness. Christian marriage is a very high and difficult standard.

**These next verses accentuate the marriage preservation approach laid out by Jesus and Paul:** 1 Corinthians 7:27-28: Remarriage is here understood to be acceptable after a proper divorce - no exceptions, no blame, though the second marriage is viewed as a lower (but not

wrong) spiritual decision. 1 Corinthians 7:39: This of course is the ideal - married for life! Romans 7:1-4: Romans 7 is speaking in general terms regarding marriage, for it *is not teaching a lesson on marriage*, it is teaching the lesson of the new relationship between Jesus and the Church in this life, which replaces the old relationship of the Law and the Jew in this life. **The lesson is: You cannot be joined to the Law and to Christ simultaneously.**

This same word *joined* is used to describe the relationship of the Church to Jesus in this life. While this is not an official marriage, it is in a sense an espousal. A side point - for a converted Jew being “dead to the Law” was the acceptable abandoning of a covenant (the converted Jew became dead to it) in favor of a higher covenant.

Matthew 19:3-12: (ASV) (also see Mark 10:1-12)

Situation	As a consecrated Christian....
<i>I am not married but I want to get married</i>	Two options: 1. Get married but “only in the Lord.” (Are we glorifying God in our marriage relationship by putting Him first? That will help minimize the difficulties) Why seek a course that creates added problems from the beginning? 2. Don’t get married. The Apostle Paul felt this was the highest option.
<i>I’m married but my spouse isn’t perfect and I can’t change him or her!</i>	We need to bring God into the relationship. Try to reconcile issues and NOT TO CREATE issues. If you are not able to resolve your issues, go get help from elders or pastors who can help give appropriate guidance. It is hard to recognize that the problem might lie with our own selves. How can I better love and serve my spouse? How can I be more sacrificial? Assume change in your spouse will not happen, so how can I adjust to it and minimize its affect on me? How can a change in my behavior counteract it?
<i>The issues in my marriage have grown to such a point where it is intolerable to be in the same room as the other. Reconciliation has been tried but is not working.</i>	Separation but not remarriage is in order. Still love one another as a brother and sister in Christ. (Jesus tells us to love even our enemies.) Gain appreciation for each other. Preferably do not get a formal divorce even if there is a permanent separation.
<i>I divorced for inappropriate reasons.</i>	Based on Scripture, remarriage is not permitted. If you have made that mistake, it is sin but still forgivable like other sins. Once sin is recognized combined <i>with</i> fruits of repentance, we can be assured God will forgive us. God hates divorce. We need to take that to heart.

Do not divorce. Reconcile and make God the chief pillar of your marriage. Be honest according to what Christianity calls us to and away from. There is a big difference between the way the world looks at these principles and the way a Christian should look at them.

**So, what about divorce?  
For Jonathan and Rick (and David!) and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!**