

VERSION 2 FROM GOOGLE DOCS DATED JULY 6

For that last several weeks we have been in a study of I Cor , at letter by Paul to the church at Corinth written some 25 years or so after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul is writing to this somewhat dysfunctional church...okay quite dysfunctional church and addressing issues they have asked him about and issues that have been reported to him by members of this church. To start he addresses issues of comparisons and judgments. Dr. Poplin spoke on those issues for the first few weeks looking at the first few chapters of this book.

Last week Rob Kelly introduced a new issue Paul begins to address - that of singleness, marriage and divorce. Rob mentioned that this look at Chapter 7 of I Cor is really a two week subject - that it is like looking at both sides of the same coin. He talked about how critical it is to understand singleness and marriage in terms of our relationship with Christ and how the enemy is absolutely committed to polluting any kind of godly relationship, be it as a single or married person.

Today I want to look at the issue of marriage and the enemy's strategies to use divorce to tear down marriage. As Rob said last week, this material is important no matter what state you find yourself in right now - single wanting to be married or married wanting to be single!

Let's start with a look at some of the biblical teachings on marriage. Why marriage? Why not simply live together as the world proposes? To understand marriage we must go back to the very beginning - to the creation story as found in Gen 1&2. In these two chapters we read how God created the world and all that is in it. Finally he created the male human being. God looked over all of his creation and it all cried out - this is good, this is great. Everything was good or great except for one thing. Part of God's creation was incomplete. It is a wonder to me that our perfect father decided to create a part of creation that was not complete simply by being in his presence. Everything was great except for the man. God said in Gen 2:18 that it was not good for man to be alone. So God created the female human being and told the two to become one - not just good friends, but one flesh united spiritually, emotionally and sexually. This couple was to be fruitful - that is procreate and multiply. Now it was all good - that is until Gen 3.

So, one of the prime purposes of marriage is to have godly offspring.

We find a second major purpose stated in part of our text for this morning. In I Cor 7:2-5 Paul states that marriage is the avenue by which sexual desires are expressed in a godly way, within the context of a loving and committed relationship. He says, as couples, we are not to deprive each other except by mutual consent. So marriage is the context in which sexuality is experienced in a way that honors God - for God created it that way.

But I believe, more importantly than procreation or sexual fulfillment, there is indeed a deeper and more fulfilling reason for marriage. This is seen in the consistent and often used metaphor of marriage being the reflection of Jesus' relationship to us, his bride, the church. For example, Paul states it this way in Eph 5:31-32: ***“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.***

Marriage throughout the scriptures is a metaphor for the covenant God has made with his people. This imagery follows all the way through to the end of days when Jesus comes to get his bride and bring her - that is us - to the great wedding banquet. And in Rev 21 we are told that the New Jerusalem has been prepared like a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband, the King of kings and Lord of lords!

So marriage is to reflect and mirror God's relationship through Jesus with us. At this point let me ask the married people in this room: How are you doing. What is your marriage reflecting to the world around you? I mean the marriage beyond the often facade of Sunday morning - the marriage behind closed doors and walls. What are you reflecting to each other about the love of the father toward his children?

You see, because marriage is a reflection of relationship with the father it has from the beginning of time come under the assault of the enemy - as Rob stated last week. Satan will do everything within his power to destroy marriages, and quite frankly he is doing a pretty good job. Just look at the divorce statistics from around the world. Depending on whose research you read the US either leads the world or is in the top five of the entire world in divorce rates. Anywhere from 43 to 49% of all first time marriages in the US will end in divorce. And here is the staggering statistic - in the past decade, divorce rates are up in every country in the world.

And because of this assault - Paul says in Chapter 7:7-8 ***7 I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do***

Paul is not speaking against marriage but is giving a stern warning. Marriage will not be easy. Contrary to what the world wants you to believe - marriage is the answer to all your loneliness issues, that simply is not the case. Marriage is work. Because marriage is a reflection of relationship with God, the primary goal of marriage is not to make me happy, but to make me holy. Marriage is a sacred covenant that should not end no matter how much work it takes. Marriage is not based on feelings but a covenant.

But that is not what the world wants you to believe. The world - and I mean the enemy behind the world's views - wants you to believe there are many and varied reasons you should end a marriage. David and I and our counseling staff have heard them too many times in our offices over these past years - the world's excuses for ending a covenant

relationship - "I'm just not happy any more...I deserve to be happy...we just don't get along...we don't have any common interests...she spends too much of my money...he spends too much time on the golf course...we are just not compatible any more...we got married for the wrong reasons in the first place...and the list goes on and on.

But what does God say? What does the Bible say about divorce - about ending a covenant relationship? In Malachi chapter 2:16a we read, "***I hate divorce,***" ***says the LORD God of Israel,*** We will come back to this section in a minute, but I want you to see here that God hates this action of divorce. Notice though what God says and does not say. He says he hates divorce, not the divorced! Why? Because of God's love for us and the knowledge of the pain and scars left from every divorce that has ever taken place. God knows that there is no such thing as a good divorce. He loves us so much that he hates that which can wound his own bride.

But we know marriages end - even Christian marriages. So, are there truly some marriages that inevitably, appropriately and even biblically will or should end? The answer is yes. God knows this as well and has stated in the scripture biblical reasons that a marriage can end. I want to look at those very few reasons.

The first and most obvious reason for a marriage to end is the death of a spouse. Paul says in 7:39 that, ***A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.*** As he has gone back and forth between the man and woman, there is nothing here that precludes the same for a husband.

But what about divorce? In Deut 24:1-4 the door was thrown wide open for divorce. Yet we see much later as Jesus is interpreting this passage to the teachers of the law that that was never meant to be. Matt 19 we find Jesus in a debate with these leaders. They were trying to trap him into siding with one or the other of two common schools of thought during his time; the followers of Shammai, a very conservative, legalistic group or those of Hillel, a much more liberal accepting group. They held very different understandings of divorce from the law. So the teachers attempt to trap him. And we read in v 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?"*** Jesus explains the reason that Moses allowed divorce as stated in Deut 24. But before he gets to answering their question in verse 8, he shows them that the very question should not need to be asked - that from the beginning the man and woman were to leave their homes and become one and no one was the separate that.

Yet divorce happened and Moses "conceded" by allowing for divorce due to indecent behavior. The problem is what defines indecent behavior. In the minds of the Shammai group, this meant only adultery. In the Hillel group this meant any kind of improper behavior and so the leaders attempt to trap Jesus into siding with one side. But he avoids the trap

Matt 19:8 ***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.”***

Jesus counters with the exception clause - except for marital unfaithfulness. The word here used is pornea - from where we get our word pornography and it refers to a wide variety of sexual sins - not just adultery as some wanted to believe nor does he allow for divorce for any reason out there.

To this we might add a second reason divorce may biblically happen and it is why God hates divorce from Mal 2. Look with me at Mal 2:13-14 ***Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant***

The Hebrew words breaking faith mean treacherous or treasonous betrayal. This is some treacherous act in a relationship that calls for loyalty, kindness and service and thus breaks the covenant God intends not to be broken and divorce follows. This is why God hates divorce - it breaks the covenant and it hurts and wounds his children because of betrayal. Now what this treacherous behavior could be is not clarified in the text.

A third biblical reason for divorce is found in our text from this morning - I Cor 7. In vr 10 Paul affirms the very words of Jesus to those who are married. We read: ***To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.***

In saying, not I but the Lord he is calling on messianic authority - the words of Jesus. To the married refers to like-minded spouses in a Christian marriage. This becomes clear as we read further.

But then he goes on in vr 12-15: ***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.***

“I not the Lord” means that Paul is now appealing to his apostolic authority and that there is no direct messianic authority on this.

Who are the rest? It is the married people who are in mixed marriages - believer and non-believer. And it is here we see one final reason for divorce. If, in a mixed marriage, the unbelieving spouse chooses to stay - then stay married. For in this situation the unbelieving spouse receives some level of sanctification.

Now let me be clear here - Paul is not saying that the unbelieving spouse has been made morally holy through their Christian spouse - for the scripture is clear that no human being has the power to save or sanctify another. What he is saying is that the spouse who lives with a Christian marriage partner experiences the influence of holiness. This is the idea that part of sanctification can take place before justification - before the person is justified before God by the blood of Jesus.

However if the unbelieving spouse should choose to leave, the believer is not bound to them. This is the third biblical reason given for a divorce. They are to let them leave for one reason - to live in peace. This by inference would mean they are free to remarry.

So biblically there are likely three reasons given for an acceptable divorce - even though two of these reasons could be quite broad.

1. Sexual unfaithfulness - sexual sin such as pornography would be included in this word
2. Treacherous or treasonous behavior that betrays and breaks the covenant of marriage
3. One of the parties is an unbeliever and chooses to leave

Listen to me - those of you in this room who are married and want out or have already gotten out of a marriage - I am not here this morning to tell you it is or was okay for you to divorce. I am not here to ease guilt that may be Godly guilt. That is between you and your heavenly father. Is repentance needed? Only you will know for divorce is always surrounded in sin. Remember - there is no such thing as a good divorce...

Nor am I here this morning to condemn anyone. Did you divorce for non-biblical reasons? This action is not the scarlet letter - the big D you must wear around your neck - the unpardonable sin. Are you re-married even though the divorce was not for biblical reasons? His grace is sufficient for all and every situation.

So in closing today, let me address the 4 groups of people in this room.

To those of you who have never married - whether 6 or 60, understand this - marriage is work and is under assault. If you do not want to enter that fight - run away from marriage. You are not less than your married brothers and sisters. If you want to marry to be happy rather than holy - run away.

To the married for the 1st time whether for 1 year or 50 years - what is your marriage reflecting to each other and to those around you in terms of Jesus and his bride?

To the single again - whether through death or divorce. You are not less than those

who are married and God has a call on your life. Is it wrong to remarry - only you with the father can answer that question.

To the remarried - however many times - the marriage you are in right now is what matters. We do not live in the past. As Paul says, forgetting what lies behind, press on toward the goal of God's calling in your life.

Remember, this world, with the enemy lurking in the background, wants marriage to be poor reflections of potential relationship with God. Let us fight to make it otherwise.