

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

IT TAKES 3



TO MAKE A MARRIAGE WORK

Introduction

In the last lesson we learned about God's commands concerning the roles of men and women. In this lesson we will study God's institution of marriage. We will study what makes a marriage work and what causes a marriage to fall apart. The main principle to remember is that marriage is not a two-way relationship...it is a three-way relationship.

Just for the record, I can speak with experience. My wife and I have been married for more than 50 years, and we have raised a wonderful Christian daughter. I believe that successful experience is important in giving marital advice. Going to a marriage counselor who has never had a long-term successful marriage is like getting advice from a sports coach who never had a winning season. This may sound elementary, but it needs to be said. I have a longtime friend who is a family counselor. He is an atheist, has never had a successful marriage, and has never had any children. My friend should not be insulted at this statement because I am sure he would not come to me, an untrained Christian zealot, for advice either. Nevertheless, many people pay to get his advice on how to raise a family. In my opinion, a person should not get family counseling unless it is from a Christian and also from a person who has been successful in raising a family. Formal training is an added

bonus.

This lesson is presented through the eyes of successful experience. More importantly, this lesson is based on God's Word. If we take our instruction from the Bible, we can never go wrong. God invented the game and he created the rule book.

Lesson

The most important advice

The most important advice we can take from God is that we should all be married to fellow Christians. You might say that this is as important as a coach doing proper recruiting. A good biblical lesson to remember is that the wise man built his house upon the rock. Without both spouses working to please God, the marriage is doomed to fail.

There is an old saying about marriage: "Women expect men to change but they never do. Men expect women to stay the same and they never do." The message here is that men by nature have a "what you see is what you get" attitude. Many women on the other hand go out of their way to put on their best face before they get married. That statement can be taken either figuratively or literally. The total advice here is twofold. First, you need to see the real person you are going to marry; and secondly, do not expect that person to change.

In line with the previous lesson, a God-fearing woman should pick a man whom she is willing to have as the head of the household. If a woman is not willing to submit to that man as her husband, then she should not marry him. Conversely, a man should not marry a woman unless he is going to love her with all his heart for as long as they live and be a leader in the family. If the man is not a leader, then he needs to find a woman who is a good helper in that area. Remember, there is a difference between giving up something you

don't want and having someone try to take from you what is rightfully yours. Many wise leaders know when to delegate authority.

Spiritually speaking

In the Old Testament, God punished the Israelites for intermarrying with pagans. If a potential mate is not of the same faith, red flags should go up. To use the sports analogy again, it is like drafting a player who has never played regularly on a sports team. He does not know the rules of the game. He knows nothing about self-sacrifice for the better good. He knows nothing about where to gather strength in difficult times. He does not have the same moral compass.

Deceivers

The Bible instructs us to be as innocent as a dove, but as shrewd as a snake. It is often too easy for a deceiver to fool a Christian because the Christian always looks for the good in a person.

Today, the pagans are disguised as Christians. Many people claim to be Christian, but their lives prove them to be liars. There also are deceivers within the church, so attending church is not the only criteria for selecting a marriage partner.

Good works

One yardstick to use is to know how this person has treated others. It is important to understand there are four groups of people that I considered "others." These people are friends, enemies, family, and strangers. If a potential marriage partner does not treat all these people by the Golden Rule, then one should no longer consider this person as a possible spouse. A good rule to follow is:

"By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear

bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit” (Matthew 7:16-19).

Faith

The Bible also teaches us that good works alone are worthless without faith. The same is true of a marriage partner. One needs to know this person’s personal relationship with Christ. If the future spouse has no meaningful relationship with Christ, he or she should run from that relationship. To marry such a person is too much of a gamble. The stakes are too high regardless of the odds. You cannot gamble with the lifelong happiness of yourself and any future children. Above all, you should not gamble with your soul. If you think the person will change, you are probably wrong. If you think you can just get a divorce if things do not work out, you are definitely wrong.

A shotgun marriage

Back in the day, there was a popular term, “shotgun wedding.” If a woman became pregnant, the father of the unborn child was expected to marry the mother as quickly as possible. The term implies that if the father of the unborn child does not get married willingly, the pregnant woman’s father would get out his shotgun as a persuader. This practice was possibly used in the Wild West during the early years of our country.

I am sure Jesus wants us to look at things a little differently. Since a believer should not be unequally yoked with a non-believer, marriage is not always the answer to an unmarried pregnancy. Getting married will not erase the sin of fornication. Only faith and repentance can erase any sin. Neither should marriage be a punishment for sin. Why add to the sin of fornication by marrying an unbeliever or a person who will not create a happy Christian life? God, not marriage, is the answer. If both people love each other and they are both Christian, then they should willingly and joyfully get married. One should also understand that having a loving

monogamous sexual relationship, or getting pregnant, is not marriage in God's eyes. Marriage, according to the Bible, is a God-given religious sacrament, a legal union, and a public proclamation.

A good marriage

In a good marriage, both the husband and wife should be willing to give up their own wishes and needs for those of the other spouse. Compromise will then end up being about who is the most generous rather than about who will receive the most. This spirit of love cannot happen without God. God not only leads us, but as Christians we know that God is always watching us. The non-believer, however, is accountable only to himself. Each spouse must live out his or her role according to God's will, as we discussed in the previous lesson.

The biggest problem

What is the biggest obstacle to a Christian family as God planned it? The biggest obstacle to married believers is society. Society today has made it virtually impossible for many people to live a family life the way God intended. In many if not most cases, the wife is forced to work a paying job in order to make ends meet. Why should the woman not have 50 percent of the authority in the family if she is providing roughly half of the income? That concept makes perfect worldly sense, but it is not God's plan. I am not saying that a woman should not work. I am only saying that we all need to spend time to raise our children and keep our family in Christian harmony.

I admire people who live a simple, humble life that allows the mother to stay at home and be a helper in raising the family. Society makes it hard to keep a marriage together and to raise a family. We must sometimes make sacrifices to maintain a Christian family.

Raising a child

God had graciously provided a way that my wife could stay at home and raise our daughter in her pre-school and early elementary years. Additionally, I would not travel overnight on a weekly basis on my job until my daughter was midway through her senior year in high school. The message I have personally is that a small child should be nurtured by the mother on a full-time basis and the father should also have a meaningful influence as head of the household.

When we delegate the training of our children to others, it creates confusion and resentment with the child. How many times have you heard people praise their father or mother for making them a success? How many times have you heard a person praise their babysitter or nanny for their success? The exception would be a grandparent who helps take an active part in raising the child. Help of a grandparent should be a supplement, and not be a substitute for parental care. One should do everything possible to keep the child under the primary care of the mother and the meaningful care of the father. Most people would not trust all their money to an outsider, so why would they trust the care of their child to an outsider?

Parental care is especially important at an early age. The studies of famous psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson have shown that a child learns shame and guilt by age six. Therefore, even at this early age, a child should know right and wrong from a Christian perspective. At age 12, most children begin to form their sense of identity based on what they have learned that far in life. In other words, if a child is a problem after about the age of 12, you probably missed your chance to change their belief system. If your child does not love the Lord by that time, in my opinion, it is extremely difficult to have an effect on that child. You will be forced to redefine everything that has formed their identity so far as a

human being.

Divorce

Despite the best planning, a marriage can go wrong. It is during this time of trial and stress that we need to listen to God. This is a time to talk to God in prayer and also to listen to God by reading his Word.

Jesus has given us clear instructions regarding divorce. The question is whether we will listen to his commands. Jesus not only changed the Old Testament law, but he made his new law stricter. Jesus makes it clear that there is only one acceptable reason for divorce. Marital infidelity is the only reason for divorce that is acceptable to God. To go against this teaching is to break the commandment concerning adultery. It should be noted in this Scripture that the divorced woman should not remarry. A woman who has been divorced because of the infidelity of a spouse is the exception. The following two Scriptures show Jesus acknowledged the Law of Moses, but he had no problem in changing the law.

1. Matthew 5:31-32....."It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery" (KJV).

2. Jesus said in Matthew 5:28 that anyone who even looks at a woman with intent to lust after her commits adultery. Matthew 5:28....."But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (KJV).

One very important lesson for a married person is to remember that marital unfaithfulness is not just a sexual act. In today's world, adultery could happen on the Internet. Any attempt to start a

romantic loving relationship is surely committing adultery. In other words, Jesus taught that adultery of the heart is as bad as adultery of the flesh. A failure to create an extramarital relationship is just as bad as succeeding at one.

The subject of divorce is also addressed by the apostle Paul. In the following Scripture, we see that Paul makes it clear that his command is not from him, but from the Lord. This message reinforces the teaching of Christ in Matthew. This Scripture also debunks the popular notion that the early church only allowed men to initiate a divorce.

1 Corinthians 7:10-11.....“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. “

The apostle Paul goes on in the following Scripture to give his personal opinion. He addresses the situation where one spouse is a believer and one is a non-believer. Paul shows unbelief is not grounds for divorce. (Perhaps by virtue of the love for each other, the believer will convert the non-believer).

1 Corinthians 7:12-14.....“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. 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. 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.”

Paul then explains what to do if the non-believer wants a divorce. What he explains in the next Scripture is that a believer is not obligated to be a victim of a non-believer who does not play by God’s rules. The believer is unlikely to save the non-believer if the

non-believer wishes to leave the relationship. One could possibly say this abandonment is spiritual adultery or infidelity. After all, marriage is a three-way covenant.

1 Corinthians 7:15.....”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. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him.”

False teaching about divorce

I recently encountered a detailed belief that fornication is not spiritual grounds for divorce. The controversy centers around the King James Version of two Scriptures.

1. Matthew 1:20.....”But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” (KJV).

2. Matthew 5:32.....”But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery” (KJV).

One reason for this false doctrine is the misinterpretation of the word "fornication." This false doctrine teaches that "fornication" only refers to actions of unmarried people, and only "adultery" refers to married people. This idea is easily disproven.

1. The NIV and 12 other modern Bible versions, including the New King James Version, do not even use the word "fornication" when translating the Greek word porneia.

2. In ancient Greece the word porneia was a general term that included incest, bestiality, homosexuality, premarital sex, prostitution, and adultery. Porneia is also used metaphorically in the

Bible to mean idolatry. Actually, the KJV does use the word correctly, but a more specific translation would have eliminated misinterpretation.

For example: If I told you "a vehicle went speeding by my house," you would not know if it was a car or a truck. In fact, it was actually a motorcycle. Then "motorcycle" is the more accurate word than "vehicle" in conveying the message. Today, in the English language we primarily use the word fornication to mean premarital sex, and adultery refers to sex outside of a marriage relationship. However, according to Webster's dictionary, a second meaning of fornication is "adultery." It is this second meaning, also used by the Greeks that some people often refuse to acknowledge.

The second reason why many people believe this false teaching about divorce is the misinterpretation of the word "wife." Although the Greek word "wife" can have two meanings, the context must determine the usage. In the Bible, the belief that an engaged woman can be called a wife is based on the fact that a Hebrew engagement was more of a formal obligation than an engagement is today. Several definitions are as follows:

1. Some say that the meaning of the word "wife" is either a married woman, or a woman in general. It is the Greek word *gunaiká* that is used in Matthew 5:32. This dual meaning lends itself to misinterpretation. One must notice that an engaged woman is not specifically mentioned, and it is clear that the word "wife" in this verse really means a married woman.
2. Other biblical reference books such as Vine's Expository Dictionary, Nelson's Bible Dictionary, and Easton's Bible Dictionary all define this Greek word for wife, *gunaiká*, as meaning only a married woman.
3. When discussing Matthew 1:20, these same false teachers claim the word "wife" now means fiancée instead of a married woman. The key phrase in this verse is "to take unto thee Mary thy wife." One can easily become confused because Mary was not Joseph's

wife at this time. Keep in mind that "fiancée" comes from the French, and the Greeks apparently did not use this word. However, as opposed to having to use the word "wife" to mean an engaged woman, the New Testament shows two ways that the New Testament denotes that a woman was engaged.

4. Matthew uses the term "wife" when he is referring to a married woman, but in Matthew 1:18 uses the term "espoused." The Greek word *Mneesteutheísees* ("espoused" in the KJV) is used in Matthew 1:18 to show that Mary is only Joseph's fiancée and not his "wife" as taught by misinterpretation.

5. Paul often uses the term "wives," but then uses the words "his virgin" to describe an engaged woman. The term "virgin" generally meant an unmarried woman, or a sexually pure woman.

6. Moreover, Mary was a virgin in two respects. She was sexually pure, and she also was Joseph's "virgin" (an unmarried daughter or maiden) in a contract to being married.

Scripture seems to be very clear that an engaged person is neither married nor worthy of the titles "husband" or "wife." Neither was an engaged person worthy of the many perks that were reserved for only married people. Think how confusing it would have been for either Jews or Greeks to use the word "wife" to identify both an engaged woman and a wife.

Why then was Joseph told to take "Mary his wife" (*gunaika*)? As explained by experts in linguistics, Joseph was instructed by the angel to take Mary "as his wife." Insufficient translation given by the KJV makes things confusing.

1. Various prestigious concordances and Greek expositives show the proper translation should be "as your wife."

2. This same translation "as your wife" is found in the Bible in Bible in Basic English, God's Word Translation, NIV, NRSV, ESV, NAS, and other Bible versions. Once again, the KJV has confused things by ignoring the context.

3. One should logically see the whole context because the angel told Joseph what to do in Matthew 1:20, and Joseph did it in Matthew 1:24.

Many false teachers are also hung up on the fact that fornication is mentioned in Matthew 5:32, but not mentioned as an exception in Luke 16:18 or Mark 10:11-12. I have several things to mention:

1. Jesus said there is one acceptable reason for divorce and remarriage, and he repeated it again in Matthew 19:3-9. That is the complete message.

2. Since some of these same false teachers have the strange belief that the exception to adultery in Matthew 5:32 applies only to fornication by engaged people, does it mean even their own interpretation of Matthew 5:32 is not true since the exception is not repeated in Mark 10:11 or Luke 16:18? You can't have it both ways.

3. Is the person who marries a divorced person guilty of adultery since it is not mentioned in Mark 10:11? Also, is the wife guilty of adultery if she puts away her husband since this is not mentioned in either Matthew or Luke? Do you see the hypocrisy of some false teachers?

4. The different accounts in the three gospels have nothing to do with different manuscripts. If this were true, different Bible versions that use different manuscripts would not agree, but, instead, all Bibles show the exception in Mathew and not in Mark and Luke. Also, the story in Matthew happens in a different place than Mark or Luke, so they are completely different occasions, not mistakes in manuscripts.

5. Why did Jesus feel obligated to give a more complete answer in Matthew 5:32 than in Luke 16:18 or Mark 10:11-12? In Matt 5:32 Jesus was giving a sermon (on the mount) and perhaps Jesus felt the need to preach the whole message about divorce to this general audience. In Mark and Luke, however, Jesus was confronting the Pharisees and Jesus evidently did not feel they should hear about the exception. In Mark, the disciples (also probably wondering why his answer differed from the Sermon on

the Mount) ask him to repeat what he said to the Pharisees and he again did not mention the exception. Only Jesus knows for sure why he chose not to mention this in regard to the Pharisees.

6. Above all else, one must admit it is quite common in the Bible that the same story or lesson is told more than once, and all the details are not given each time. (In fact, atheists use this same false logic to try and prove the Bible is inaccurate.)

For example, In Luke 18:18, a man asks Jesus what one must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus answered, "Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother" (KJV). Does this mean it is okay to violate the other five commandments and still inherit eternal life? Of course not, so let's forget about this silly logic of omission.

I have given information on the interpretation of Matthew 5:32. I have appealed to both one's common sense and appreciation of expert opinion. I have shown that fornication done in the context of marriage is "adultery." I want to end this section on divorce by appealing to one's sense of what Christ would want in a marriage. If you believe the misinterpretation of Matthew 5:32, then you must believe the following:

1. A man who is married for years and has children is allowed to get a divorce ("put away his wife") if he later finds out his wife committed fornication while they were only engaged.
2. A deceiving man can seek out a Christian wife and cheat openly (even in their own house) during the whole marriage and she is stuck with this man unless he dies.
3. If a woman gets a divorce because of adultery and then remarries, she can never be forgiven since the false teaching states remarriage is a continuous sin. I guess the woman is supposed to get a second divorce and leave her children to the adulterous first husband.
4. If a woman gets divorced and remarries, she can never be

forgiven because remarriage is a continuous sin. However, if she kills her first husband and then remarries, she can be forgiven since murder is a one-time sin, and it is okay to remarry if the first husband is dead.

One can easily see that misinterpretation of Scripture creates some strange beliefs. These false interpretations reward the sinner but punish the innocent partner and the children. The correct and prevailing belief on divorce is clearly compatible with the nature and the teachings of Christ.

1. The Pharisees thought they could run after other women and not be guilty of adultery unless they had "sex with that woman" (sound familiar?) Jesus, however, told them that even lusting after a woman was adultery. Jesus went on to say that any fornication within marriage is adultery and reason for divorce.

2. Which is the greater sin: to have infidelity before marriage or after marriage? Why should a wife be a lifetime victim of a godless cheating husband? Why should children be brought up in such a household?

3. The apostle Paul states that a woman is also not bound if an unbelieving husband chooses to leave her. We read in 1 Corinthians 7:15....."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" (KJV).

4. The bondage he was talking about was the bond he mentioned in Romans 7:2. Marriage is a three-way covenant, and abandoning both God and the wife is breaking the marriage agreement by committing both idolatry and adultery. As Paul said, God wants us to live in peace and not be unequally yoked.

5. Jesus once asked which is more holy: the gift on the altar or the altar that makes the gift holy (Matthew 23:17-20). By the same token, which is the worse sin—remarriage or the divorce that makes the second marriage a sin? My point is that divorce is the sin that needs forgiveness, not remarriage.

6. If your divorce is no longer remembered by God, you are truly free to start a new life in Christ.
7. Finally, you can either get your information from godly experts who are translators, or biblical scholars who write expositories, Bible dictionaries, professors who teach at respected seminaries, or you can get your information from Facebook pages, charlatan book authors, or YouTube videos. There is an old saying: "Consider the source." The choice is yours.

The good news about divorce

The good news about divorce is that God does not force a person to stay in an adulterous relationship. There is also good news for those who have violated God's laws concerning divorce. Divorce is not the unforgivable sin. Divorce is a one-time sin so God will forgive anyone who truly wants forgiveness. We can always go to God and ask forgiveness for our failures and ask for strength in the future. God will not only forgive us, but he will completely forget our sins and give us a fresh start. Remember, many righteous men such as Abraham, Moses, and King David went against the Genesis definition of marriage and were apparently forgiven.

1. Matthew 21:31-32....."And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

2. Luke 24:46-47....."He told them, 'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'"

3. Isaiah 1:18....."Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (KJV).

4. "Hebrews 10:17-18....."And their sins and iniquities will I

remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin" (KJV)

The catch.....

One thing, however, makes it tough to stand before God and ask forgiveness for the improper reasons for divorce. Looking back on your sin, you would have to say that you are truly sorry for your sin. You would have to acknowledge that you would not do the same thing if you were to go back in time. It is the same principle as a person who says he is sorry for stealing money. If the person had it to do all over again, would he still steal the money because he really needed the money at that time? God knows it is easy to say you're sorry and not really mean it.

Summary

I do not pretend to understand God's reasoning for all his laws on divorce. I cannot even say I agree with all his laws. If it were up to me, I would have a detailed list of reasons (such as abuse) why one should be allowed to divorce their spouse. Incidentally, I do not see how being separated in the case of abuse can be wrong even though divorce is prohibited. Since I am not God, I can only obey his laws and believe that he knows best. If I ever break any of his laws regarding any subject, I can only hope that the Holy Spirit will lead me to be sorry and repent. I know that God will forgive me of any sin if I am sincere.

Finally, we should not judge or look down upon anyone who is divorced. We do not know the circumstances. We do not know if they had a good biblical reason for the divorce. Even if the person got a divorce for a sinful reason, we do not know if the person has been forgiven. The person's circumstances are between that person and their Creator. We need to remember that Christ showed love and compassion to the adulteress prostitute who was going to

be stoned. We also need to remember that he told her to “sin no more.”

I cannot end without saying that people who flaunt their sin (regardless of the type of sin) need to be addressed by the body of believers. Unrepentant sinners should not be part of the church. Paul made this teaching very clear, as mentioned earlier in this book, in 1 Corinthians 5:11.

In this final Scripture of the lesson, Jesus gives us a history of marriage so we can understand its purpose. Jesus made it clear that what he was about to say was not based on the customs of the time, but based on the very nature of creation. He then goes on to define marriage as only between a man and a woman. Finally, Jesus lets us know that marriage is meant to be permanent. Matthew 19:4-6.....”And he answered and said unto them, ‘Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, 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? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder’” (KJV).

Review

1. Is marriage a two-way relationship? Explain.
2. Can a couple make a vow to God and be considered married in God’s eyes? Explain.
3. What are the reasons the Old Testament gives as acceptable for divorce? What are the reasons Jesus gives in the New Testament? Why the difference?
4. Is a sexual relationship the only definition of adultery? Explain your definition.
5. May a divorced woman remarry? Explain.
6. Does the Bible state that only a man may get a divorce?

7. Explain the religious teaching of divorce involving a believer and an unbeliever. Is there a difference between initiating a divorce and accepting one?
8. Give examples of marriage and divorce that do not meet both the requirements of God and the requirements of man.
9. Give personal insight on what makes a successful marriage.