

DOCTRINE OF DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

March 22, 1992

- I. Introduction: marriage has been beautifully and skillfully fashioned by God for the maximum joy and fulfillment of each couple. Since marriage is a divine institution, God's design should govern all marital relationships that grow into true marital bliss.
 - A. Because permanence is a definite part of the divine design, and therefore pleases the Lord, the antithesis does not please Him.
 - B. God's viewpoint of divorce is that it is tantamount to "treachery"; for this reason, the Scripture declares "'For I hate divorce,' says the Lord"; Mal.2:16; see the context of vs.14-16.
 - C. Though permanence is God's directive will, or preferred course, this does not entirely cancel out recourse to divorce or separation.
 - D. God also has a permissive will that allows for a couple to split-up, given the right circumstances.
 - E. God's directive or preferred course of action is the avoidance of a marital split-up.
- II. The Old Testament (OT) regulation of divorce. Scripture: Deut.24:1-4.
 - A. The potential events in a marital relationship are: marriage, divorce, and remarriage.
 - B. This passage shows what God allowed, regulated, and prohibited in OT times.
 - C. In vss.1-3 we have a protasis: a five-fold IF situation, followed by the apodosis statement of resultant action in vs.4.
 - D. In other words, IF the things of vs.1-3 happen, THEN the principle of vs.4 must be applied.
 - E. The five-fold IF.
 1. Marriage: when a man marries a woman, from the divine viewpoint he is assuming the responsibility of headship, authority, and leadership in her life; he is not to be a bully.
 2. Sexual Indecency: she proved to be sexually undesirable because of "some indecency"; not including adultery, since death was the prescribed punishment.
 3. Divorce: his unwillingness to forgive has driven him to secure this document, acceptable in the courts of Israel, formalizing the termination of the marriage. In practice, the legal document had its positive points: first, it protected her from a charge of adultery if she remarried; secondly, the necessity of obtaining the legal document before the divorce was final served to preclude hasty and rash divorces. God Himself is pictured as having given the Northern Kingdom a certificate of divorce when He sent them into exile, Jer.3:8; Isa.50:1. Under the law, divorce was permitted because of hardness of heart.
 4. Remarriage: in vs.2 she leaves and remarries, indicating the first marriage is terminated. According to Mt.19:7-9 and Mk.10:4,5, divorce was only a part of God's permissive will, because of the hardness of man's heart, to avoid the continuation of unbearable and unnecessary suffering.
 - F. Divorce #2: in vs.3, if the woman is divorced by husband #2, she is not free to remarry husband #1.
 - G. The apodosis forbids remarriage under any circumstances to the first husband, vs.4. She is unclean in respect to her first husband, so that she is forever off limits to him. The second marriage terminated the first in God's eyes. Bringing "sin on the land" is the multiplication of the sins of a nation until the fifth cycle of discipline is administered.
 1. Once someone has gone as far as divorce and remarriage there is to be no looking back. No regrets, past bridges are to be burned.
 2. To remarry the former mate is a thing of disgust in God's eyes.
 3. Such a sin brings cursing to the nation.
 4. A woman was free to marry a third husband.
 - H. Conclusions.
 1. Divorce is neither mandatory nor encouraged, even for sexual indecency.
 2. The Old Testament does not institute divorce, but rather tolerates and regulates it to protect

against greater wrong.

3. No one has a right, independent of Biblical reasons, to divorce his or her partner.
4. Divorce should never be considered an option until every attempt at reconciliation has failed.
5. The relatively liberal permission of divorce under the Mosaic Law was simply a stopgap measure. Christ nullified this measure.

III. Christ's first teaching on divorce.

- A. Scripture: Mt.5:31,32.
- B. Jesus, fully aware of the stopgap measure, teaches the original intent of God's design for marriage, cp. Mt.5:17. Usually the man initiates the divorce, but Mk.10:12 envisages a wife taking the initiative, as in 1Cor.7:11 with regard to separation.
- C. Jesus clarifies exactly when one has grounds for a divorce. The emphasis is to maintain the marriage, even if one partner is unfaithful. This is NOT a command to go out and get a divorce, but rather the only basis for a legitimate divorce.
- D. The words "except for immorality" define the only bona fide basis for divorce in God's eyes.
- E. But divorce is still not commanded; the couple should forgive and try to keep the marriage together, even if sexual unfaithfulness is involved.
- F. Christ presents legal divorce as the exception, not the norm.
- G. Christ teaches that anyone who gets a divorce and remarries under any other circumstances commits adultery.
- H. Marriages arising from non-biblical divorces are to be regarded as legitimate, even though an act of adultery was committed initially.

IV. Christ's second teaching on divorce.

- A. Scripture: Mt.19:1-12.
- B. The background to His teaching is vs.1-3. They hope to put Jesus on the spot, knowing His position and knowing the popular viewpoint. They hope to discredit Him before the people. These Pharisees (school of Hillel) held to a liberal interpretation of Deut.24:1-4, which emphasized the "out" of marriage.
- C. Christ's response to the question emphasizes the permanence of the marriage union, vs.4-6; vs.5 "leave behind":
 1. It refers to dying. Application: when two people marry, they die to parental authority; they are no longer obligated by the plan of God to be obedient to parents.
 2. The word is used of going away to a far country. The couple is to physically separate from their parents and establish their own independent home.
 3. The word is used for "forsaking and abandoning" something. The application is that the new couple abandons all previous family goals and ambitions and takes on new goals.
 4. The word is used of leaving one in a certain state of affairs; that is, when two people leave home to marry, their parents are still their parents and are to be respected. Obedience has ceased, but honor remains.
- D. The Pharisees' response indicates confusion between the permissive and directive will of God, vs.7. After Jesus had taken their thinking back to the main issue of God's design for marriage (i.e. permanence being God's directive will), the same question crossed their minds and they blurted out this second question in unison. Since they were leaning so heavily on a super liberal interpretation of Deut.24, they were all on the same mental wavelength.
- E. Because the Jews were negative to doctrine, it meant that they were inevitably negative to right man/right woman. Therefore, they rejected doctrine through their volition, thus developing scar tissue on the soul. This caused rejection of the Lord's directive will. In the face of such insubordination and negative volition to the plan of God, and because of the suffering, heartache, and even greater abuse to the plan of God, Moses permitted it. Christ corrects them, cp. vs.7. Immorality gives a bona fide legal basis for divorce in God's eyes, but is not commanded. When

a mate divorces for a non-biblical reason and remarries, that individual has committed adultery and the other is free to remarry without sin.

F. The disciples' response to Christ's teaching, vs.10.

1. The disciples make an unbiblical statement which contradicts Gen.2:18 "The Lord said, 'It is not good for a man to be alone.'"
2. Their thinking is fuzzy and they do not immediately adjust to the Lord's doctrine.
3. So they make a false conclusion that celibacy should be the norm if a man cannot get an easy divorce.
4. They say "it is better not to marry" if adultery is the only loophole.
5. The Lord points out that they do not understand what they have said.

G. Christ's teaching on the disciples' response, vs.11,12.

1. The disciples' statement had limited application, since very few do not marry.
2. "Can accept" means to make room for someone as a guest, and here refers to accepting celibacy into one's thinking.
3. Single status is not the norm but the exception. (Idiots make the exception the norm.)
4. The disciple's seek to make the exception the norm as the Pharisees did with the stopgap provision.
5. For those who accept the exception, God has some very special blessings.
6. Jesus says "not so fast" with your conclusions, since every man does not have the capacity to live happily single.
7. Vs.12 lists those to whom it has been given.

V. The Pauline privilege of 1Cor.7:15 allows a believer to remarry if abandoned by an unbeliever (apart from adultery): "*Yet if the unbelieving one leaves (abandonment), let him leave (do not attempt reconciliation) the brother (believing husband) or sister (believing wife) is not under bondage in such cases (that this refers to being released from the marriage, see vss.27 and 39; cf. Rom.7:2), but God has called us to peace.*"

VI. There are two grounds for divorce and remarriage in Scripture.

- A. Adultery.
- B. Abandonment by an unbeliever.

VII. One is only free to remarry if one of three conditions exists.

- A. Death of one's spouse, Rom.7:2.
- B. The innocent party in an adulterous affair, Mt.19:9.
- C. A believer is free to remarry if abandoned by an unbeliever, 1Cor.7:15.

VIII. The Pauline concession permits a separation, 1Cor.7:10-11 "But to the married I give instruction, not I, but the Lord (this is not merely Paul's personal viewpoint), that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not send his wife away."

- A. The higher Biblical principle is that they are to remain together, v.10.
- B. But in the case of separation, they have two options, vs.11.
 1. To remain unmarried, or
 2. To be reconciled (to adhere to the higher Biblical principle of Gen.1 and 2, and for the sake of the children).

IX. In conclusion, we should always keep before us the divine design from creation, as Jesus taught in Mt.19:4-6 "*And He answered and said, 'Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE (God so created the human race that they might come together in a special and permanent union)', and said 'FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH?'*" Consequently, they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

