

“The Essentials Of Our Faith”

Session XXXIX

August 14, 2011

“The Christian Family”

Part Eight: “The Question Of Divorce And Remarriage”

Introduction:

Throughout the history of the New Testament Church, few questions have been more difficult or more divisive than the question of “divorce” and the following issue of “remarriage”.

- Is divorce allowed in the life of a Christian?
- If divorce comes in the life of a Christian, is remarriage allowed?
- If divorce and remarriage have occurred in the life of a Christian, what is the standing of that Christian before God?

Many Christians have expressed a measure of confusion or frustration by stating, “I wish the Bible said more about these questions or made the answers more clear!” Many Christians are also confused by the fact that so many Christian leaders and Churches differ on the answers given to these questions.

“Not only are personal lives in a quandary, but the way pastors and Biblical scholars have varied on the issue of divorce and remarriage must leave the layperson with much confusion: if the experts can’t agree, what is the laity to do or think?”

--Wayne House

Let’s make this point very clear – Good and Godly men and women “_____” on the question of divorce and remarriage! If you were to make a list of Christian leaders, authors, and Churches for whom you hold deep respect, you would find several differing positions on these questions. What do we do with this fact?

1. Do we conclude that God did not give us a final or sufficient answer in Scripture so that we are left to deal with divorce and remarriage based on our human perspective? or,
2. Do we hold to the fact that God has promised to “guide” us to the truth of His Word by the ministry of His Spirit, John 16:13? While we cannot explain why others genuinely differ with us, we must hold our personal “belief” or “conviction” as led by the Holy Spirit. This has been the principle of interpretation at RWBC throughout its history.

Biblical Background

“If we believe the Bible is totally true, we cannot dodge its claims on our lives in sensitive areas such as divorce.”
--Francis Schaeffer

I. What is “Marriage”?

A. Genesis 2:24.

“For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”

1. Marriage is the union of a man and a woman.
2. Marriage is the union of a man and a woman based upon a public statement of “leaving” the existing family and “cleaving” to one another to form a new family.
--This act is publically, legally, and culturally “declared”, usually by a prescribed ceremony.
3. Marriage is the union of a man and a woman based upon the private act of becoming “one flesh” – the two become one!
--This is Biblically understood to be a permanent, lifelong, merging of the two individuals.

B. Matthew 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,’ and said, ‘For this cause a man shall leave his father and this 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.”

1. Jesus quoted the statements of Genesis 2:24 to confirm God’s original design and intention for human marriage – a permanent, “one-flesh” relationship.
2. Jesus emphasized that “God” is the One who joins a man and woman together.
3. Jesus stressed the permanency of the marriage relationship and commanded that it not be broken by mankind!

“As marriage was originally planned there was no provision for ending it except by death. This concept was behind the Lord’s answer to the Pharisees in Matthew 19:4-6 where He appeals to Genesis 2:24 as the basis of His teaching that marriage is indissoluble.”

–Charles Ryrie

“Marriage was divinely designed and instituted as a lifelong relationship.”

–J. Carl Laney

God takes a very high view of marriage because it is foundational to the well-being of mankind and because it pictures the relationship He forms with every Christian!

II. What Did Jesus Teach Concerning Divorce And Remarriage?

--Matthew 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12.

A. The Situation: The Pharisees tested Jesus with a question.

"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?" (Matt. 19:3)

1. Jesus' teaching conflicted with their understanding of the Law of Moses;
2. The Pharisees hoped to "trap" him into making a personally offensive remark about marriage so that King Herod would put Him to death, Mark 6:17-19.

B. The Background: There was major debate among the rabbis over the legitimate cause for which one might divorce his wife.

1. The School of Hillel was liberal → Taught that divorce was legitimate for "any reason";
2. The School of Shammai was conservative → Taught that divorce was allowed only on the grounds of "adultery".

C. Jesus' Response and Teaching: Jesus **rejects** both the liberal and the conservative views on divorce and remarriage held by the rabbis of His day.

1. He said that "divorce" had no part in God's original design!
2. He said that "marriage" was intended to be permanent!

*"Jesus' answer to the Pharisees' question, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all', Matt. 19:3, is clearly '**No!**' In contrast to the religious leaders of His day, Jesus affirmed the permanence and inviolability of the God-ordained marriage union."*

--J. Carl Laney

D. The Challenge of the Pharisees → Moses' teaching in Deut. 24:1-4.

"Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate and divorce her?" (Matt. 19:7)

--Note: *"The Pharisees clearly understood Jesus to be taking a '**No Divorce**' viewpoint and sought to challenge Him on the basis of Deut. 24:1-4. . . . Like many evangelicals today, the Pharisees had missed the point of the Mosaic legislation. **Moses did not institute divorce** . . . This passage provides direction for cases in which divorce and remarriage has **already occurred**."*

--J. Carl Laney

*"Stated briefly, the 'restoration-of-a-former-marriage' regulation (law) says that a divorced woman who has contracted a second marriage may **never** subsequently be taken back by her first husband."*

--William A. Heth

"Israel's faith produced various responses to these practices of the neighboring nations. We find outright rejection and prohibition of some customs while others are tolerated and regulated . . . some practices are accepted and even affirmed."

--William A. Heth

". . . although Israel was called to be a holy nation, 'They did not live in a hermetically sealed isolation from the rest of humanity. . . . So there are countless points of common culture, social norms and conventions, shared by Israel and her contemporaries."

--C.J.H. Wright

--Key: Israel “copied” the surrounding heathen cultures and began to divorce.
Divorce was not a “provision” of God, but a rebellious “demand” of His people!

E. Jesus’ Clarification of His Teaching → Matt. 19:8-9.

1. Moses did not initiate “divorce”:

*“And 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**,” Matt. 19:8.*

*“While the Pharisees thought that Moses commanded divorce, Jesus explains that He only ‘permitted’ it . . . the Mosaic legislation was necessitated by **Israel’s hard-hearted rejection** of God’s original design for marriage . . . Thus He set the Mosaic ‘concession’ in stark contrast with God’s original plan for marriage . . .” --J. C. Laney*

2. The meaning of “porneia”:

“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality (‘porneia’), and marries another woman commits adultery.” Matt. 19:9.

--What does ‘porneia’ mean: (There is general uncertainty about the meaning!)

- 1) Many (most) evangelicals equate porneia with “adultery”;
(This is not the meaning of the word, however. “Adultery” = moicheia)
- 2) Some interpret porneia as “any general sexual irregularity”, including “adultery”;
- 3) Some interpret porneia as “unfaithfulness during the betrothal/engagement period”;
- 4) Some interpret porneia as “marriage within prohibited relationships”, Lev. 18:6-18, (Illegal or incestuous marriages).

--Note: Most of those who hold that the “exception clause” applies to adultery believe that the exception (adultery) allows for both divorce and remarriage.

*“Many evangelicals believe that Jesus permitted ‘innocent spouses’ to remarry after divorce without being guilty of adultery if the divorce resulted from the immorality (porneia) of the partner. They find support for this view in their understanding of how the ‘certificate of divorce’ operates in Deut. 24:1-4. . . . remarriage after a proper divorce (such as Matt. 5:32 or 19:9) **does not** constitute adultery. --William A. Heth*

“The Pharisees . . . felt that the mere ‘certificate of divorce’ was enough to dissolve the relationship.” --William A. Heth

“Jesus is here denying the efficacy of the ‘bill of divorce’ to dissolve the old marriage . . . thus allowing the wife the freedom to remarry.” --R. Westbrook

“Where the Jewish law went wrong was in the failure to perceive that the ‘one flesh’ persisted after divorce.” --I.D.M. Derrett

F. Conclusion: Jesus restored marriage to its “creation standards” for the Church Age.

“Jesus demanded the unconditional allegiance of those who chose to follow Him . . . He went so far as to forewarn prospective disciples that there would be a high cost involved. . . . Those who claim to be Jesus’ followers must . . . accept the new elements of the present rule of God that Jesus inaugurated. . . . This is just as true of Jesus’ high standards for marriage as it is for other aspects of Christian faith and practice. . . . Our

Lord's teaching about divorce and remarriage . . . astounded His closest followers. They responded as if His standards for the permanence of marriage were too difficult to bear: 'If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry' (Matt. 19:10). Nevertheless, Jesus encouraged them and let them know that God's sustaining grace was available to them in the realm of marriage, too. (Matt. 19:9-12, 26)" --W.A. Heth

"Even though marital separation or legal divorce may be advisable under some circumstances, Jesus taught that His disciples should not remarry after divorce. This would be contrary to the nature of marriage as God designed it in His creation and a violation of the seventh commandment: 'You shall not commit adultery', Deut. 5:18." --W.A. Heth

III. What Did Paul Teach Concerning Divorce and Remarriage?

--I Cor. 7:10-40.

A. Is Divorce Permitted? (I Cor. 7:10-11)

"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."

--"Paul declared in no uncertain terms that married persons should not seek divorce."

--"Paul interpreted Christ's 'command' as prohibiting divorce among married Believers."

--William A. Heth

B. Is Marriage to an Unbeliever Binding? (I Cor. 7:12-13)

" . . . if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away."

--"According to Paul, a marriage is binding even if one of the partners is an unbeliever."

--" . . . in the case of a spiritually mixed marriage, the Christian partner is not to seek a divorce."

--William A. Heth

C. Is "Desertion" a basis for divorce? (I Cor. 7:15-16)

"Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases . . ." (v. 15)

--Note: "Verse 15 is interpreted by some as allowing for divorce and remarriage in the case of abandonment . . . Paul is understood as exercising his 'pastoral privilege' in modifying the teaching of Jesus by adding another exception – desertion."

--Key: "Paul exempts the Christian from the responsibility for the divorce which an unbelieving mate brings about. Nothing is said one way or the other about the possibility of remarriage for the Believer."

--William A. Heth

D. Paul's Summary: "For a marriage that ends short of death, reconciliation or a single life are the only two alternatives Paul acknowledges, I Cor. 7:11."

--J. Carl Laney

IV. Summary: The Teaching of the N.T. on Divorce and Remarriage.

1. God intends that marriage be a lifelong relationship, Mk. 10:2-9; Matt. 19:3-8.
2. Married couples should not separate or divorce, I Cor. 7:10; Mk. 10:9; Matt. 19:6.
3. In cases of separation or divorce, those involved must remain single or be reconciled, I Cor. 7:11.
4. Remarriage after divorce constitutes adultery, Matt. 5:32; Mk. 10:11-12; Lk. 16:18.
5. The N.T. allows Christians to remarry only in the event that their 'one flesh' marriage has been dissolved through the death of one of the partners, Rom. 7:2-3; I Cor. 7:39.

"If a Biblical view on divorce and remarriage were taught in today's Churches, marriage would be entered into with greater caution and partners would commit themselves to making their marriages work. Marriages would be stronger and longer lasting were divorce not viewed as a way out of a difficult situation."

--J. Carl Laney

"While personal experience and feelings have a significant role in determining who we are and what we think, these factors cannot be the ultimate basis for providing pastoral counsel to those facing divorce or considering remarriage. God's Word must be the foundation of all practical theology. It is on Scripture, not experience, that a Biblical theology of divorce and remarriage must be grounded." --J.C. Laney

The Biblical Convictions Concerning **"Divorce and Remarriage"** **Held by the Elders of Riverwood Bible Church**

The following agreements were formulated among the Elders in 1984 and have been the basis for decisions relating to "divorce" and "remarriage" since that time:

1. The leadership of Riverwood Bible Church recognizes the Biblical allowance of **divorce** on the basis of "adultery" – marital unfaithfulness, Matt. 19:9.
2. The leadership of Riverwood Bible Church does not recognize the allowance of **remarriage** for any reason – except in the case of a Believer whose spouse has died, leaving them a "widow" or "widower", I Cor. 7:39.
3. The leadership of Riverwood Bible Church recognizes that there are some within the Body of Christ who differ with this position.
 - a. We honor the individual Believer's right to hold a differing interpretation.

- b. We honor the individual Believer's right to remarry according to their conviction and conscience. (Their personal interpretation of the Word of God)
- c. We honor the request of Believers who have been remarried under another Church's authority, or civil authority, to become members of RWBC, if they meet the normal requirements for Church membership.
- d. We hold no "ill-will" or "disrespect" for a Believer's remarriage after divorce and will tolerate no such attitude within our Body of Believers. (They are not "second-class" Christians!)
- e. The Elders of Riverwood Bible Church request the understanding and support of our Body of Believers in the following policies:
 - 1) No Elder at Riverwood will conduct or officiate a remarriage.
 - 2) The facilities of RWBC will not be used to conduct a remarriage.
 - 3) Elected leadership (the office of Elder or Deacon) is not open to those who are divorced or remarried, I Timothy 3:2,12; Titus 1:6.
 - 4) Most teaching positions are not open to those who are divorced or remarried.

Conclusion

"There is hardly a person in our country today who has not been touched in one way or another by the tragedy of divorce. Some have gone through the experience of a parent or child being divorced; for others it has been another relative or a close friend. Divorce has become so common that it is accepted as inevitable by much of the evangelical community.

In his Essay on Man, Alexander Pope wrote:

*Vice is a monster of so frightful mien
As to be hated needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.*

There is the ever-present danger that when sin becomes commonplace it will soon be accepted as normal. Satan has so successfully duped people into compromise that what was disdained in a previous generation is accepted as legitimate by this generation. Because of the strategic nature of the home and family, and because of its inseparable link to the life and ministry of the Church, we must not tolerate this acceptance with regard to divorce and remarriage.

If the deterioration is allowed to continue, Satan may soon be successful in eliminating the leadership in our Churches. If that happens, then the Church will lose its impact in the world." (From Meant To Last by Paul E. Steele and Charles C. Ryrie)