

life group study guide

Is Divorce Ever Permitted? July 22, 2012



Introduction

If Americans can be divorced for “incompatibility,” then I cannot conceive why they are not all divorced. I have known many happy marriages, but never a compatible one. The whole aim of marriage is to fight through and survive the instant when incompatibility becomes unquestionable. (G.K. Chesterton)

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38)

1. Are you surprised this question surfaced in the “Ask Anything” series?
2. Why do think this question is being asked to the Church today?

Bible study

Read Matt 19:3-12

What was the question the Pharisees asked Jesus? (vs 3)

- Why do you think they included the phrase “for any reason at all”?
- What does the inclusion of that phrase imply?
- Do you detect in their question many of the attitudes prevalent in our society today about marriage?

What does Jesus say in response? (vs 4-6)

- What is Jesus’ question back to the Pharisees?
- Where does Jesus point them for the answer?
- Who does Jesus say joined the couple in marriage?

What do the Pharisees ask as a follow up question? (vs 7)

- Why do you think the Pharisees felt the need to press the issue further after Jesus answered them directly with Scripture?
 - Is this this need for further clarification implied in the question for this sermon? Why do you think this is?
- How does Jesus answer them? (vs 8-9)
 - What is the disciples’ reaction to Jesus’ answer? (vs 10)
 - Does this reaction imply that this issue has been a difficult one for millennia?

Jesus tells us in these verses above that it was God’s original design for one man and one woman to be united as one flesh, and failing that (vs12), persons should abstain from marriage and sex.

But there is a larger issues involved in this question and its answer. That is the issue of sin, its consequences and how to deal with it.

Sin and consequences

Read Matt 5:27-28

- What does Jesus equate with adultery?

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- Does this mean that someone could divorce their spouse because of a lustful look (vs28) as well the physical act of adultery (Matt 19:9)? [As Paul says in Rom 6:2, “May it never be!”]
- Do we treat “small” sins, such as lust, differently than “biggies” such as adultery? Does Jesus?

In Matt 19:7 (above), why did Jesus say Moses introduced divorce regulations?

- How does sin affect the heart of man?
- In what ways does it harden the heart against God’s original plan?

Read Matt 6:21-22

- How does Jesus’ equate murder and hate—or even derogatory speech against someone?
- Do you think the people listening to Jesus speak these words were shocked at His statement equating hate and murder?
- Are the earthly consequences the same for these sins?
- Are the eternal consequences for these sins the same?
- Why do earthly consequences make some sins “worse” in our eyes? Is this consistent with Jesus’ teaching?

Genesis 2-3

Jesus (in Matt 19 above) quotes Gen 2:24-25 as the design of God for man and woman.

Sin enters in Gen 3 as Adam and Eve are ashamed (vs7), afraid (vs8), and they begin to turn on each other (vs12)

- Are these results—from just one sin—the same symptoms that can weaken a marriage today?
- Can divorce be both a consequence of sin as well as a sin itself?

The Bible indicates that adultery (Matt 19:9) can be a reason for divorce. Other verses suggest desertion by an unbelieving spouse can break the marriage bonds (1 Cor 7:15). No spouse is required to stay in an abusive and/or dangerous situation (get help immediately; call Sheltering Wings).

Read 1 Cor 6:9-10

- Who will not enter heaven? (vs9-10)
- What sins are listed that will keep people from heaven? (vs9-10)
- Who qualifies as good enough to enter? (Rom 3:10-12)

Every man and woman is sinful. (Rom 3:23)

Read 1 Cor 6:11 - Paul is writing to the Christian church in Corinth

- How does he refer to them in the past?
- What hope does he give them?
- What is the source of that hope?
- Does that hope still apply to the drunkards, liars, thieves, adulterers, homosexuals and covetous (and yes, divorced people) in the church today?

Conclusion

Many studies have shown that Christians divorce at nearly the same rates for those professing other faiths (or no faith.)

- Do you think this had anything to do with the question being raised in this series?

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The church is filled with sinful people. It has been said the church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.

- How can the church balance truth and grace with respect to sinful behavior?

Application

With regard to your marriage, pay attention to the small stuff. I suspect there are few marriages that were entered into with the intention of divorce as the result.

Read James 1:14-15

- What are the three steps identified in these verses?
- What begins the process that ends in death (or divorce = the death of the marriage)?

William Doherty (author of Take Back Your Marriage: Sticking Together in a World that Pulls Us Apart and Soul Searching: Why Psychotherapy Must Promote Moral Responsibility) believes there are two ingredients for a successful marriage—commitment and intentionality.

By intentionality he explains “being conscious about maintaining a connection through, among other things, “a reservoir of marital rituals of connection and intimacy.”

Positive steps for your marriage

- Practice forgiveness (70 times 7!)
- Pray for your marriage
- Seek counsel – ask others for a recommendation based on their positive experience
- Praise God for his plan of salvation—to send Jesus to die as penalty for our sin and reconcile us back to God—to have us sanctified and justified before God despite our sinful past and present weakness.