

Rich Nathan
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Home Improvement Series

What the Bible Teaches About Divorce

As many of you know, I have been doing a series on the family called “Home Improvement.” And I am dealing with a topic tonight [today] that is definitely much less fun than talking about how to have a relationship with your kids or how to spice up your marriage. I am going to deal with the topic of divorce and try to help you to, at least, begin to hear and understand what the Bible teaches about divorce.

Now, I was telling a counselor friend that I am going to teach on the subject of divorce. He just backed up and said, “Whoaaaaa, you are really wanting to put your head in the lion’s mouth.” Then he made some jokes about how he was glad that he was a counselor and not a pastor, because every one likes him and would hate me.

The fact is to have any integrity in teaching about the family in the 90’s, at some point I have to tackle the subject of divorce, however unpleasant it is. Right now in America there are over one million divorces a year. One out of every two new marriages ends in divorce – most of them in the first 10 years. In some counties in California, two out of every three new marriages end in divorce. Because of the high divorce rates that have just persisted in the U.S. – whatever you have heard, by the way, about divorce coming down, the rate has leveled off, but it leveled off at such a high level that we are still seeing about one out of every two new marriages ending in divorce. We have

leveled off in America at a very high rate and our divorce rates are among the highest in the world.

The effect of all of this is that over a third of all children will experience the divorce of their parents at some point while they are growing up. If your kids haven't experienced a divorce, then many of their friends have experienced the divorce of their parents.

Now, the source of this enormous number of divorces is complicated. It can't be neatly summarized in a paragraph or two or even in a talk. The sources go back, I think, to fundamental shifts in family life, the effect of urbanization in terms of separating people from their extended families, the lack of support for nuclear families, the effect of feminism and the shift of power in the families, the role changes. Ultimately, I believe as a Christian that these fundamental changes in our understanding of marriage have to do with separating marriage from a firm foundation in God.

Well, when you are an advocate, as I am, for long-term committed relationships, when you are an advocate for commitment, then as you look out on our larger culture, what you see is what I call a conspiracy against commitment at every turn. There is, first of all, a divorce industry. A flowing together of various professionals who are supposedly dedicated to helping their clients find happiness, but whom in the end, each assist in expediting divorce. I am talking about the lawyers, the doctors, the counselors, and the psychiatrists, all of whom keep the divorce wheels spinning at a faster and faster clip. And the moment someone contacts a divorce lawyer, they are fed into the machinery that is going to move them down the process inevitably toward divorce. That is just the way it is. There are very, very few attorneys, having been contacted, that are

going to back you in the other direction toward healthy reconciliation, toward the laying down of your rights, towards giving up claims. No, they are going to help you show your spouse that you mean business. Make sure your ex-spouse isn't pilfering your joint checking account. You are going to put a stop on certain financial transactions. They are going to focus you on the scariest prospect of what could happen if you don't protect yourself in these hundred ways and advocate approaches that will lead to a further breakdown of trust.

And counselors, by and large, add to this problem as well. There are so few counselors other than a few Christian counselors that I am aware of that actually fight for the marriage over against the happiness or comfort level of one of the individual participants. So many counselors increase the happiness level of one of the spouses at the expense of long-term commitment to marriage and laying down rights. So few counselors will change a client to sacrifice and self-denial.

And then the books, my goodness – I went over to Border's last Monday, as Marlene and I usually go there on Monday mornings on my day off, and went into the marriage and divorce section. There probably were four or five dozens books suggesting that you could make divorce essentially pain free for you and your children. That you could remain friends with your ex-spouse and deal with this whole messy process in a mature, sane, reasonable way. That you could cut your losses if you would just follow their advice.

Along with the probably fifteen books telling you how to draft your own legal papers and do a divorce cheaply, while not getting taken to the cleaners, I could only find three books, three, in six shelves of books advocating staying in a bad marriage and

working through your problems rather than escaping from your problems. One wonderful book was written by Diane Medved, the wife of Michael Medved, the movie critic. Diane Medved wrote a wonderful book called *The Case Against Divorce*, subtitled, *Discover the Lures, the Lies and the Emotional Traps of Divorce, Plus Seven Vital Reasons to Stay Together*. And another very helpful book that I read was called *Divorce Busting, Marriage Serving Techniques* by Michelle Wiener Davis.

But they stood out from the rest of the books in that they were such notable exceptions. There is a divorce industry pressing us toward breaking our marital commitments.

And then, of course, there are all the friends around the struggling person. Friends who have their own interest in seeing our commitments broken. It is the rarest thing in the world for a friend these days, even a Christian friend, to confront a complaining wife or complaining husband and say, “You know, that kind of thinking is going to hurt your marriage. And I want to support your marriage and not just you.” All of us have been so trained to help support the individual who is complaining, to offer comfort and sympathy and to assist the person to express all of their anger and hurt and to pick at the wound. Oh, there are all the friends that combine with the divorce industry. Especially friends who have been separated or divorced. They are typically, particularly, unhelpful in supporting marital commitment, maybe out of guilt regarding what they have done. Maybe there is this internal need to justify one’s actions with the actions of dozens of others. “Well, I am not so bad. Everyone is doing it.” There are the friends.

And then, of course, there is the media. There is the idealization of what marriage ought to be like – ecstatic, unrelenting, passionate sex, a physical attraction that just runs

at the highest peak. That is what people in the movies have. Tom Cruise and whoever he is with. Or Sharon Stone and whoever she's with. Compared to the people in the movies, we are positively dead. We must be in hibernation. But invariably, the people in the movies are not married. The single life, the free life, is the life that is celebrated. The movies tell us that people who are single have better sex, more sex, more companionship despite every sociological study to the contrary that says that single people are lonelier and have infinitely less sex and much worse sex than married people.

Add to that the societal insistence on short-term thinking, on today, on here and now, on how I am feeling at this moment. We live in an instant society that demands instant gratification. If I have to work hard at something, it's not worth it. You mean I don't get to be the boss of the company right out of college? You mean I have to work my way up? Forget it. That will take 15 years. I am not into that.

The other day I saw an advertisement for instant cheese omelets. You take a plastic container and stick the container in the microwave and at the end of that process, you get this goop that this company calls a cheese omelet. Because making an omelet is so difficult. If a person can't make a cheese omelet, what hope is there for making a lifetime commitment to one's spouse? What we end up with is marriage until the passion dies rather than marriage until death do us part.

From every side we are hit with a conspiracy against commitment. And of course, if we are honest with ourselves, we have to say that this conspiracy from the outside finds a willing co-conspirator inside of us. And if we are unhappy in our marriages, if things are really bad, if we want out, then we do open ourselves up to the divorce industry – to the counselors who will support us over against our marriage, to the

comforting therapists who tell us the only way for us is to leave and get out, to the lawyers and the books and the friends and the media. The conspiracy against commitment is not only going on outside of us, but, friends, if we are honest with ourselves, we would say that it is going on inside of our hearts. The only reason that this stuff has its effect is because there is a willing listener and participant inside.

Well, this evening [morning] I am going to challenge that conspiracy – the outside and inside conspirators in a talk that I am titling, *What the Bible Teaches About Divorce*.

Now, in considering what the Bible teaches about divorce, I have to tell you that my reflections on this subject are not the result of a superficial consideration of this matter. Over the years, I have probably read about 15 books on the subject of what the Bible teaches about divorce and remarriage. I have read everything I could get my hands on. I have talked to lots and lots of pastors and counselors about this subject. I have done thorough-going word studies in the original languages to see what the Bible was intending to teach. What I am going to share with you is the result of a very long process of consideration over many years.

If you have a Bible, I would like you to turn with me to Matthew 19. In verse 3 of Matthew 19 it says:

“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?’ ‘Haven’t you read,’ he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.’”

‘Why then,’ they asked, ‘did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?’

Jesus replied, ‘Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.’”

Jesus is saying, and it ought to be obvious to anyone who reads the Bible, that divorce was never in the original blueprint for the family. From the beginning, it wasn’t this way, Jesus said. The original design was very clear. One man and one woman joined together in a permanent union called marriage for life. A perfect plan. A perfect design. What innocence. What innocence. What bliss. Over against the subjective standard for marriage to live together until we can’t stand each other, or until we stop communicating, or until we grow apart. The Bible lays out an absolute rule way back in Genesis: Life long, permanent union. Till death do us part.

But remember, when these words from Genesis were uttered, sin had not yet entered the Garden and had not come to shatter man and all of his relationships. But God lays out the rules. Permanent union. One woman, one man for life.

Nevertheless, sin did enter the Garden and into the relationships of men and women. It had a shattering impact on all that God created. And so God permits people to get divorce apart from his original blueprint and design because of sin. God permits people to get divorced and to remarry for certain narrowly defined reasons. See, Jesus doesn’t support the Pharisees in their argument that we ought to be able to get divorced for any and every reason. God does not support no-fault divorce or the easy divorce laws

that are now the law in almost every state in the country. God has a plan of permanence for marriage. But he does recognize that sin sometimes does have a shattering effect on our relationship with each other. So for a few narrowly defined reasons, God says, “I give you permission. I give you liberty to divorce. But not for any and every reason.” You need to underline that in your minds.

You say, “Well, what are the reasons that God gives permission and liberty to someone to divorce?”

The first reason is marital unfaithfulness -- adultery. Verse 9: *“I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife except for marital unfaithfulness and marries another commits adultery.”*

Now, I know that there are thousands of different interpretations of what Jesus is getting at here. I could pull together a host of Bible experts who would all disagree with each other regarding the cultural setting and who Jesus is agreeing with and what school of thought and all of that. But I have lived with a rule for Bible interpretation that has served me, I think, well and I believe will serve you well. And the rule of Bible interpretation that I live with is that if the normal sense, or the plain sense, of a verse makes sense, then don’t seek another sense. If what a verse seems to be saying makes good sense, then I am going to presume that that is what it means.

So what this verse seems to be saying is that one of the permissible grounds for divorce is marital unfaithfulness. The Greek word for unfaithfulness is “pornea” where we get the word pornography. It means sexual immorality. I believe that if a spouse is involved in unrepentant sexual immorality, either homosexual immorality or heterosexual immorality and will not repent of it and turn away, then divorce is permissible.

Jesus doesn't mandate a divorce. He says, "for this reason, God permitted divorce." I believe that Jesus is talking here about a life-style of immorality. I know there are couples, who wanting to escape a marriage, will fish around for an activity that was done 5-10 years before. And I am in no way condoning one-night stands or a fling. I don't think that is what Jesus is talking about. I think he is talking about a person who is living a continually deceptive and immoral life-style. That despite their protestations to the contrary and their continual suggestion that this time they have repented, nevertheless, they keep falling back into the same lying, deceitful behavior. Jesus says that that pornea, that unfaithfulness grants the grieved party permission to divorce.

Adultery and abandonment. 1 Cor. 7:15, *"If an unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances. God has called us to peace."*

Paul suggests it is unthinkable that a believer would abandon their spouse. But he recognizes that some marriages might be mixed marriages, people come to Christ after they get married. Or in our day some people deliberately choose to marry someone who is not a Christian. That person, then, wants out of the marriage and Paul is saying that it not the believer's duty to fight to the last ounce of blood, to hold on for dear life, to give up every shred of dignity, to capitulate to every sinful demand. If an unbeliever wishes to leave and walk away from marriage, it is permissible, although not required, that a Christian say, "Okay, you can leave. I will give you this divorce." It is unthinkable that a Christian would walk away. But a Christian can permit it.

Adultery, abandonment and here is a third situation – I believe divorce is permissible apart from Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says this: *“Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. The old things have passed away. New things have come.”*

I take this verse literally, I believe in the extreme that new means new. And so that when God promises a sinner that he is now a new creature because of his yielding his life to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, when someone passes through the born-again experience, I take this to mean exactly what it says, they are new creations. A brand new, fresh creation, unlike before. The word “new” comes from the Greek word *kainos*, it means that which is unaccustomed or unused. Not new in time or recent, but new as to form or quality, of a different nature from what is contrasted as old. The synonym would be fresh, a clean slate, starting over.

I do not expect, nor do I believe, that the Bible expects a non-Christian to live as a Christian. I do not expect a non-Christian to believe in God for their marriages, or to yield to the commandments of God. I do not expect a non-Christian to fight for commitment, to be self-denying, to put their own selfishness to death. I don’t expect any of those things of someone who has not bowed before Jesus as Lord and who does not have God’s power at work in their lives enabling them to obey.

And so, when someone comes to me to ask whether they can be remarried, they tell me they were divorced, but the divorce took place before they came to Christ, I tell them that that sin of divorce is no different than any other sin they committed in the past. They are now new creations, fresh, starting with a clean slate, virginal, if you will. As a Christian pastor, I have no problem performing the marriage of someone who was divorced apart from Christ but has since become a Christian.

I have serious problems and will not remarry someone who was divorced as a Christian apart from these exceptions: adultery, abandonment, life apart from Christ and, finally, I will add a fourth that I know will be somewhat controversial here, but my fourth exception would be abuse – a sustained physical or sexual abuse.

You say, “Rich, how can you come up with that?”

Well, frankly, at this point, I see two principles colliding – the principle of God’s protection and preservation of life and God’s desire that marriage be permanent. Where two principles in the Bible collide, we must opt, if we are to be ethical, for the higher principle, for the one that seems to be more important to the whole fabric of scripture. And in my thinking, I believe that life itself is more important than marriage. I am not saying happy life, satisfied fulfilled life. I am talking about physical preservation and well-being of one’s self or one’s children. I would have no difficulty permitting a wife to leave her husband and saying that the church will stand with you if the wife or the children were being physically or sexually abused. Not only would we stand with such a wife, but also we would stand against the abuser and exercise church discipline. We in the Vineyard have done this in the past and will continue to have that as our practice.

Here is the rule. It is so helpful to have a rule in a day where there are no rules, when everyone makes up their own rules and everything is so subjective. God, the creator of marriage, says, “I give you a clear rule. Marriage is permanent. It is binding. It is meant to be for all time between one man and one woman. But because of the effects of sin, I give you permission to carve a few narrow exceptions to the rule: adultery, abandonment, divorces that took place apart from Christ and abuse.”

Well, if the rule is so clear and the exceptions so narrow, why is it that Christians fall prey to all of the other excuses and reasons for getting divorced beyond what we see in the Bible? And people have as many reasons as there are people. We are always fighting. All we do is fight. We have grown apart. My husband is completely incapable of communicating. My wife always nags. I have to pursue this opportunity of a lifetime, this career opportunity. I need my independence. Our problems have lasted too long and we can't change. He can't change. She can't change. We have been around and around this for five years or ten years.

You know, we are not the first group of people who wanted to carve out a few more exceptions to the rule than what the Bible permits. Carving out new exceptions has been the tendency of God's people for the last 2500 years.

Turn with me back to the book of Malachi, which is the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi 2:10 - 16 (we'll finish with this text),

“Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our father by breaking faith with one another? Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign God. As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the Lord cut him off from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings offerings to the Lord Almighty. 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 your wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your

marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. 'I hate divorce,' says the Lord God of Israel, 'and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,' says the Lord Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith."

Now Malachi is dealing with two marital problems. The first is the problem of mixed marriages. Verse 11: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign God." The Bible is consistent from beginning to end prohibiting someone who is part of God's people, who is a believer, who has given their life to Jesus Christ, from marrying someone who has not given their life to Jesus Christ. We could point to dozens of scriptures laying out an absolutely clear rule. Single people, listen to me now. God's word absolutely prohibits you from getting engaged to or marrying someone who is not sincerely attached to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. And if you don't want to get engaged or married, you won't date. Spiritually mixed marriages are prohibited in the Bible. God wants you to be united not only physically and emotionally but also spiritually in terms of your commitment to Him.

But the second thing that is prohibited here is divorce. Verse 16: *"I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel.*" We are focusing on this latter prohibition today.

You say, "Rich, given the clarity of the scriptures, with the unmistakably clear message of the Bible that marriage is to be a permanent union between one man and one woman for all of their lives apart from a few sin-shattering exceptions, why do Christian people pursue divorce?"

And I think this text gives us three illusions that lead to dissolutions. Five times God uses the phrase “breaking faith”. Why do you profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another? In verse 11: Judah has broken faith. In verse 14: It is because the Lord is acting as a witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her. And then verse 15: Guard yourself in spirit and do not break faith. Breaking faith, breaking faith, breaking faith. And finally in verse 16 the fifth time this phrase is used: Guard yourself in spirit and do not break faith.

The Hebrew word for breaking faith is *bagad*. It is related to a Hebrew word *begeg*, which means, “garment.” And what the author is getting at here is that like a garment covers up a person’s body, so rationalizations and the multiplication of reasons cover up the sin of divorce. In other words, God charges his people, who pursue a divorce outside of a few narrow exceptions with a cover-up job. They are trying to mask their real motivation with a bunch of rationalizations. He says: Cover up; cover up; cover up.

You know, the word of God, living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword, it pierces through our cover-ups. It cuts up all of our candy-coated lies and gets to the real poison underneath. Oh, that we would have the courage of real friends to cut through people’s cover-ups. Our friends that are going through a so-called mid-life crisis and are looking for a little bit of excitement in their lives. Can we not call it what it is? Selfishness.

We justify throwing out a long-term marriage, wanting a fresh start. Instead of saying, “What you are doing, friend, is quitting and hurting people. Throwing out your responsibilities and running away.” Are you so afraid of your mortality and dying that

you have to try to recapture that which you never had and will never have a chance of getting again?

The word of God speaks just that frankly. Cover up. Five times, you're just rationalizing your selfishness.

What are the three illusions that lead, then, to dissolution?

Now I would divide this text into three sections really. Three big lies, or what I am calling on your outlines, "Three illusions about dissolutions." The first lie is in verses 10-12, *"Have we not all one Father? Did not God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another? Judah has broken faith."*

Here is the lie we tell about others. Regarding divorce, we say that what we do is no one else's business and it only affects us. "This is something that I need to do. This breaking of my marital vow is something that *I* need to do. And listen, it affects me and is no one else's business. Church, you have no right to speak to me about this. Church you have no right to confront me. Church, you have no right to challenge me. You haven't lived in my situation."

The Lord pulls away that cover-up, that garment and says, "Friend, what you do is not your private business, but you have broken faith with the people of God." You see this text is reminding us that none of us lives only to ourselves. None of us sins only to ourselves. It says we have one Father. Do you understand that there is a spiritual unity between you and other Christians? To call God your Father means that other Christians are your brothers and sisters and you have been bound together, your lives are bound together. Our marriage breakups affect not only us, but also others.

You know, ever since our first parents sinned, the human race has been living with these illusions of privatized sin, of sin only affecting us and no one else. This attitude goes back to Cain and Abel where Cain said, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Do I have any responsibility towards another in my decision-making? Am I actually a steward of my brother’s welfare? America in the 90’s says no. America in the 90’s puts such a premium on individual self-expression. The biblical premium is not on self-actualization. The biblical premium is not on you becoming all you were meant to be. The biblical premium is on you loving. Love is the aim of our charge; not self-actualization.

It is an illusion that divorce affects only you. Divorces have devastating consequences towards others. If you have children, no matter how many books are out on the market place about helping your children through divorce, all of the studies suggest that divorce is devastating to children. They generally feel profound senses of loss and separation from the spouse that is gone. There is anger and guilt. Depending on the child’s age, they can regress to a prior stage of development. Preschoolers can regress to sucking their thumbs and asking for pacifiers, carrying a security blanket, needing help feeding themselves. Young elementary school children will often begin, for no reason, to cry, to ask questions about whether you are going to leave them or they begin to feel responsible for the divorce. Many adolescents will begin acting out, particularly sexually, or become intently depressed.

None of us lives unto ourselves, and none of us sins unto ourselves. There is a growing collection of literature about adult children of divorce. The fact is, divorce is one of the most stressful and devastating things that any child could go through.

It is also devastating to friends and to parents. You know, we plan a wedding and we invite hundreds of relatives and friends because we want their support and we know that our lives are bound together with a larger community. But when people plan a divorce, they say that it affects no one else. What about the community of people who were there and witnessed your vows? What about them and their feelings? Many in-laws are hurt and sad because they fell in love with their son-in-law or daughter-in-law and then find that person pushed out of the family. Their relationship with their grandchildren may be destroyed to the point where they no longer get to see them as often.

It has a devastating effect on the church. You know, there are always struggling marriages. And every time someone runs for the door, the escape hatch gets larger as the next tottering marriage looks at the larger opening that you created and says, "Well, they made it through." Friends, we are united with each other. It is not just you and God.

And contrary to the American ideal of the guy sitting on top of the mountain with his Grape nuts and dog and Chevy Blazer, the Bible says that what we do affects others. You cannot get a divorce unto yourself.

The second illusion concerns our relationship with God. Verse 13 says, *"Another thing you do, you flood the Lord's altar with your tears, you weep and wail because He no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure. Why? It is because the Lord is acting as a witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have broken faith with her."* And verse 16 says, *"I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel, 'and I hate a man covering himself with violence as with his garments,' says the Lord God Almighty."*

The second illusion is that I can maintain my relationship with God while I pursue this separation or divorce. How many Christians I've heard say that. "Well I still really love the Lord and I still go to church while I continue to divorce contrary to the clear rule of scripture." God says that is a cover-up. You've broken faith. In fact, the altar is shut off. We have no idea that our sin, our lack of repentance can block off the access that we seek to God.

Friends, listen to me. I believe that people who continue to sin in an area are frankly just kidding themselves regarding their relationships with God. It is a lie. That is like saying you can offend your neighbor and kick their dog and dump garbage on their lawn and still have a good relationship with them. The apostle John in 1 John 1 says this, *"If we claim to have fellowship with him, yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth."* It is an illusion that we are having this warm fellowship with him and that we have access to God while the doorway to heaven is blocked off by our sins.

And can anything be stronger than the statement, "I hate divorce?" Talk about an absolute in an age of relativism and subjectivism. I looked up the verses regarding what God hates (by the way you can underline that in your Bible and in your own private study look up verses regarding what God hates). It is a rare thing when God says, "I hate this" or "I hate that." But when the Bible notes something that God hates, you'd better underline it in your Bible and say, "I want to avoid that like the plague." Because the word "hate" literally means "enemy." God is saying someone who does this kind of thing becomes my enemy. It is the strongest possible language. "You have become my opponent, my adversary, says the Lord." It is very rare that God uses that kind of

language in the Bible. When He does, it is certainly a call to attention. You don't want to be on the side of being an enemy of God. You don't want God opposing you.

There are things that God hates. One of the things that God hates is empty religion. He says that on several occasions. He hates the pretense, the prayers, and the show of the whole thing, the hype where there is no integrity. Amos 5:21 says, *"Put away from me your feasts and your festivals. I hate it without justice, without integrity."* God hates hypocritical religion.

God hates the manipulation of the court system. He says so in Zechariah 8:16-27. Some of you have been through a divorce procured by your ex-spouses. You may have lived with the manipulation of the court system against you. Securing lawyers who will lie and have born perjury. The Lord says, "I hate all of that." I hate people getting high-priced attorneys in order to work injustice.

Proverbs 6:16-17 goes down the body regarding things the Lord hates. Most of them have to do with breaking relationships and discord. And here God says he hates divorce.

Now this to me friends is the bottom line of all scriptural teaching and all confrontation when someone says, "I am going to separate. I am thinking about divorce." The first thing I would ask such a person is, "Do you claim to be a Christian?" If the person says, "Well, I don't know." "Well, let me explain to you what Christianity is." But if a person says, "Yes I do claim to be a Christian." or "I am offended by that question, of course I am a Christian." Then I would say, "Well, then you understand that when you say that you are a Christian, what you are saying is that you've turned the right to call the shots over to Jesus Christ as your Lord. To be a Christian means that you have

bowed the knee and that you have said not only, Jesus forgives my sins, but you have embraced the whole of Jesus and have said, Jesus be Lord of my life. I want you in control. I am going to love what you love and hate what you hate.”

Do you claim to be a Christian?

Well, yes, I claim to be a Christian.

Well then friend, how can you say that Jesus Christ has the right to call the shots in your life while you are doing something that he hates? How can you say, “I love God” when you pursue a course of action that will take many months and dozens and dozens of decisions, not just one, but dozens of decisions, dozens of filings, repeatedly saying to God, “I hate you and I hate what you love.”

Now listen, it all boils down to a matter of truth. I am not talking pragmatism here. Some people say, “Well, God surely wouldn’t want me to be unhappy. He would want my marriage to work wouldn’t he?”

I would say, generally yes, God would want your marriage to work and generally yes, God would want you to be happy. But we do not submit to Jesus Christ as Lord because it is working for us. The truth is not determined because it is working. I happen to believe that Christianity works out in the long run, and it certainly works out for eternity. From the eternal perspective it works out to be honest and unselfish and forgiving and sexually faithful and humble. Sometimes in the short run, none of these things work out. And sometimes in the short run, your marriage does not work out. You cannot approach Jesus Christ only if he is working for you now. To be a Christian is to say that I am going to come to you, Christ as Lord, because you are true. You really are the Son of God. You really did rise from the dead. Because this is true, whether it works

out or not. To be a Christian is not to have your agenda fulfilled. It is to take on a whole new agenda, namely, the will of God. And God has spoken this passage and has said, “I hate divorce.”

And finally, it is a lie to claim that marriage is just a human contract, just an arrangement between two people that we can dispose of as we choose, so long as we both shall love. God rubs our conscience here. In verse 14 he says, *“The Lord is acting as a witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her though she is your partner and the wife of your marriage covenant.”*

Notice the lofty terms God uses regarding marriage. He calls the spouse three things. 1) “The wife of your youth” 2) “Your partner” or your companion and 3) “The wife of your marriage covenant.” I believe these three descriptions refer to the three kinds of love that ought to be present in the marriage.

The wife of your youth refers always to romantic love, to erotic love, to sexual love. The Bible tells us in Proverbs 5:13, *“Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets? Your streams of water in the public square? Let them be yours alone. Never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth, a loving doe a graceful deer. May her breasts satisfy you always. May you be ever captivated by her love.”*

The wife of your youth is always the biblical image of romantic love. The kind of love that ought to delight us. And that word “partner” or “companion” is a biblical word for friendship-love. Here is the person who is your friend. The one who you have shared life together with. You have shared the hard times; you have shared the good times. You

have shared birthdays, you have shared engagement, and you've shared weddings. You have shared a marriage bed. This is someone who has been walking through life with you, your friend.

And finally, you're spouses by covenant. We are talking about committed love here. Covenant love, *agape* love. We have gone from *eros*, romantic love, the wife of your youth, to *phileo* the Greek word for friendship love and *agape*, covenant love. He is talking about a love that hangs in there because we made a vow. And to God a vow is a vow is a vow. Marriage is not just some human contrivance or convenience. It is a sacred vow involving God.

And a Christian, apart from the expectations that I described, may not pursue divorce or dissolution because to do so is to sin against the spouse of your youth, your friend, your spouse by covenant, by a vow. To pursue divorce is to say that you are a liar and that when you swore unfailing, undying love to your partner, you were lying.

I want to close with a few remarks. I have been very strong today because I want to hold back the tide, the conspiracy that is rotting the foundations of our marriages. I want you, married people to slam the escape hatch door and say, there is no escape. Jesus Christ is my Lord and he has declared what he thinks about divorce. He hates it. Therefore, it is not an option for me, as one who is under his Lordship.

But to close the door is not to close the jail cell. To close the door is to close the door as a Christian with Jesus on the inside, in the room with us. I am preaching this message to Christians only. I think it is nonsensical to have the high bar demand that I am laying out today if you don't have a faith in a God who can supply all your needs. If you haven't embraced a God who can meet you in your weakness, who is with you in

suffering and depression, a God to whom you can pour your heart out to, a God who understands, if you don't have faith in a God who can clean your heart from bitterness, who can change you and change your spouse, and provide some hope for the future, if there is no such God as that, then go ahead and get a divorce. But we Christians are committed to a God that supplies all that we need. And therefore, we can walk out these hard things.

There are some here who as believers in Christ choose to do what God hated, and you pursued a divorce apart from these expectations. I don't care what your reasons were, the Bible says that they are cover-ups. The remedy for you is restoration. Friend, to be a Christian means that you turn yourself over to Jesus, not only in mind, "Oh yes I believe certain things about the death of Christ," but you yield yourself to Christ at the level of your will and emotions. If you have pursued a divorce against what God says, then you have not yielded your will to Christ, and you need to.

I am not saying today, that you go and ask God's forgiveness, or anything that shallow. I am saying that you need to be involved in a process that challenges you at the point of your will so that Jesus Christ becomes your Lord, not just in word, but in truth.