

Divorce

(lecture by Steve Gregg)

I. What is at stake?

- A. *the purity, testimony and unity of the church,*
- B. *the sanctity of the divine institution of marriage,*
- C. *the security of children's right to be raised by their two original parents*
- D. *the stability of society's most fundamental element: the family.*

II. What's wrong with divorce?

- A. *the breaking of a vow made before God (Eccl.5:4-7)*
- B. *steals from the other party :*
years of youth, innocence, privacy, virginity, forfeited options for personal happiness, and the natural, deep-seated human hope of sharing life and children with one lifelong partner.
- C. *incalculable emotional pain, and financial hardship upon the cheated spouse, the children in the family, concerned relatives and sympathetic friends.*

III. Things to consider before judging particular cases

- A. *A divorce may be unilateral (80% are): the will of one party imposed against the will of the other.*
- B. *Vows are not unconditionally binding. (e.g., Gen.24:8/Num.30:5, 8. See also Jer.18:7-10)*
- C. *Remarriage is an option to validly divorced persons.*
- D. *God's behavior as a husband.*
 1. *God married Israel and considered idolatry as adultery (Ex.20:5/Ex.34:15-16)*
 2. *Such adultery was viewed as a breaking off of the covenantal relationship (Deut.31:16/Zech.11:10)*
 3. *When Israel worshipped idols, God divorced her (Isa.50:1/Jer.3:8)*
 4. *Subsequently, God took another people (wife) (Deut. 32:21/Hos.2:16-23/Isa.65:1, 15 62:2-5/ 54:1-2/Matt.21:43; 26:28-29)*

IV. Biblical passages about divorce

- A. *those in the Old Testament (Gen.2:24/Deut.24:1-4/Ezra 10:2-5/Mal.2:13-16/Mark 6:18)*
- B. *those in Jesus' recorded teaching (Matt.5:32/19:9/Mark 10:11-12/Luke 16:18)*

C. those in the letters of Paul the apostle (Rom.7:2-3/1 Cor.7:10-15, 26-28, 39/1 Tim.3:2).

V. How the ethics of Jesus relate to those of the Old Testament

- A. *Deut.24 and Matt.19:1-7*
- B. *Matt.5:17ff*

VI. The limits of the application of Jesus' teaching on divorce

- A. *What Paul reveals (1 Cor.7:10ff)*
- B. *The Authenticity of the Exception*
 1. *The problem: Mark, Luke and Paul omit it*
 2. *A solution: There are many statements of Jesus which are generalizd without stating exceptions that are admitted elsewhere as valid. Jesus said, "Give to everyone who asks of you" (Luke 6:30), though exceptions are certainly implied (must we give our children everything that they request?) and even stated (2 Thes.3:10). Comp. Mark 8:12 & Matt.12:39*

C. The Meaning of "Fornication"

Greek terms: "fornication" (*porneia*) ["adultery" =(*moicheia*)]
Used of homosexuality (Jude 7)
Used of incest (1 Cor.5:1)
Used in Gr. OT of Adultery

VII. Differences in the case Paul describes as opposed to that Jesus discusses (1 Cor.7:12-15)

- A. *religiously-mixed marriage Vs. same-faith marriages;*
- B. *the person initiating the divorce*
- C. *under bondage Vs. not under bondage*

Divorce Stats:

- Between 66 and 91% of divorces are initiated by the wife.
- About 80% of divorces are unilateral, against the wishes of spouse.
- Initiating a divorce transfers control of the children to the State.
- In 93% of divorces, custody of the children is awarded to the mother.
- Children in fatherless homes are at much higher-risk of sexual molestation, drug and alcohol abuse, promiscuity, criminal behavior, suicide, and future marriage failure.

"The moral complexity of the divorce and remarriage issue presents, in my opinion, the single greatest pastoral challenge for evangelical Christianity in our time. Evangelicals, theoretically, take a more restrictive position on the issue of divorce than does the dominant culture, though in practice, recent polls suggest that the divorce rate among evangelicals is not much different from that of those who profess no Christian convictions at all. Also, the sheer numbers of divorced and/or remarried persons seeking admission into the church, or desiring counsel from Christians, places a burden of heretofore unknown proportions upon those charged with pastoral care and instruction of the saints and the integrity of the church.

"This is not just a problem for pastors, either. Almost every Christian has been called upon to advise some friend or loved one about this issue at one time or another. Those who care for the temporal and eternal well-being of others are increasingly thrust into the position of having to decide what, precisely, the Scriptures teach with reference to 1) couples contemplating a divorce; 2) those already divorced and contemplating remarriage; and 3) those who have already been divorced and remarried prior to presenting themselves as candidates for inclusion into Christian fellowship.

"The significance of the problem must not be minimized, since Jesus taught that, at least in some cases, divorce and remarriage are tantamount to adultery (Matt.5:32/19:9), and since Paul wrote that no adulterer will enter the kingdom of God (1 Cor.6:9), that a little leaven (moral compromise), if allowed in the church, will leaven the whole lump (1 Cor.5:6-7), and that Christians should not so much as eat with those professing to be brethren, but who engage in immoral behavior, which would include sinful remarriage (1 Cor.5:11).

"At stake are the purity, testimony and unity of the church, the sanctity of the divine institution of marriage, the security of children's right to be raised by their two original parents, and the stability of society's most fundamental element: the family—all of which present strong incentives for the Christian not to take lightly an issue like divorce. If vigilance be neglected in this matter and standards be relaxed "in special cases," we may find to our chagrin that the camel's nose is inside the tent (and where the camel's nose is, can the whole camel be far behind?)." —From my online article: *Divorce and Remarriage*

"In all other areas of contract law those who break a contract are expected to compensate their partner or partners," writes Robert Whelan, "but under a system of 'no fault' divorce, this essential element of

contract law is abrogated. Divorce comes to be regarded as one of those things that just happens.

"As many critics point out, no legal system can operate on such principles. 'What if American law refused to enforce business contracts and indeed systematically favored the party that wished to withdraw, on the grounds that 'fault' was messy and irrelevant and exposed judges and attorneys to unpleasant acrimony,'" asks Gallagher, "... so that when disputes arose, thieves and owners would be left to work things out among themselves, because after all, one cannot legislate morality?" Columnist Melanie Phillips also notes this peculiar legal principle. "In every other area of law, it aims to make people who have done wrong accept the consequences of their actions," she notes. "Imagine saying of a neighbor who tears down the next door's fence that he shouldn't be held responsible and made to pay for the destruction because it would make it more difficult for the two of them to live next door to each other afterwards..."

"These laws, enacted throughout the Western world, can in retrospect be seen as one of the boldest social experiments in modern history. The result effectively ended marriage as a legal contract. Today it is not possible to form a binding agreement to create a family. Regardless of the terms by which it is created, government officials can, at the request of one spouse, simply dissolve a marriage—and the private household it creates—over the objection of the other."

—*Taken Into Custody: The War Against Fathers, Marriage and the Family*, by Stephen Baskerville, 45-46

"It's finally time to renounce—openly and clearly—these self-serving platitudes about independence and fulfillment and look at the reality of divorce. We act too frequently as if every infirm marriage deserves to die, based simply upon the emotional report of one distressed partner. Rather than viewing a separation first with alarm, we're full of sympathy for a divorcing friend, and we offer understanding of the temporary insanity involved in severing old ties.

"Still influenced by the "do your own thing" era, we don't act constructively. We don't take the husband (or wife) by the shoulders and shake him. We don't shout in his ear that he might be making a disastrous mistake. Even if we care immensely about him, we feel it's too intrusively 'judgmental' to do more than step back and say, 'Okay, if that's what you want,' and close our eyes to the consequences. My research suggests that this is more cruelty than friendship."

—The Case Against Divorce, by Dr. Diane Medved, 8