

20. Marriage and divorce

February 17, 2013

There are a couple of words all these celebrities use whenever they go through their divorces: "Irreconcilable differences." Sounds like a lawyer's talk, don't you think? I don't believe that these people have any idea what they are supposed to do in marriage, nor do they care to make any effort to keep their marriages going. They only go by how they feel; no lasting commitment to one another.

Here are some other excuses that people use when they married and divorced:

She married him because he was such a "strong man"

She divorced him because he was such a "dominating pig."

He married her because she was so "fragile and petite."

He divorced her because she was so "weak and helpless."

She married him because "he knows how to provide a good living."

She divorced him because "all he thinks about is business."

He married her because "she reminds me of my mother."

He divorced her because "she's getting more like her mother every day."

She married him because he was "happy and romantic."

She divorced him because he was "shiftless and fun-loving."

He married her because she was "steady and sensible."

He divorced her because she was "boring and dull."

My wife once told others that I am a 'model husband.' As you know my English is not perfect, so I looked up the word 'model' in the dictionary. It said, "A small imitation, not the real thing." Is there supposed to be a compliment somewhere in there?

This morning, I am going to cram two very important subjects – Marriage and Divorce – into a 35 minute teaching which is somewhat crazy. So, stay with me.

A. LOVE AND RESPECT

Ephesians 5:33 Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Cultivating marriage is not by emotion, but commitment to one another and total obedience to the Lord.

The main reason for such high divorce rate comes from the idea that you only stay in marriage as long as you feel love for your spouse. In this "EVER YTHING INSTANT" culture, the meaning of "til death do us part" does not ring in people's hearts a whole lot. As long as their spouses make them feel good or beneficial to them, they would stay in marriage. But if there is a new and seemingly better deal, they say, "Astalavista, baby."

Some say, "Loving feelings should come naturally in a relationship, so if you have to work at it, something's wrong." But the truth is exactly the opposite: If you truly love someone, you will work hard to keep that relationship.

In v33, apostle Paul sums up what he said from v22-32 for husbands and wives. These are two simple commands – “Love your wife as Christ loves the church and you love yourself; respect and submit to your husband.” But they are very hard to do. No, let me rephrase that. It is IMPOSSIBLE to do them without the help of the Holy Spirit.

Ruth Graham, Billy Graham’s late wife was asked if she ever thought about divorce and she said, “No, I’ve never thought of divorce in all these 35 years of marriage, but,” she said, “I did think of murder a few times.”

Whenever I officiate a wedding ceremony, I get to have the best seat in the house. I see the groom in his tuxedo on my left side who is so nervous that he is about to pass out. He couldn’t find enough oxygen in the air. Then, here comes the bride who is dressed in her beautiful wedding gown, glowing, and beaming. The bride’s mom is proud and at the same time sad for losing her baby girl. Then, the bride’s father is desperate to remember his line that has only four words “Her mother and I” as he walks her down the aisle.

I heard a story about the nervous bride’s father who answered, “My mother and I” instead of “Her mother and I” when he was asked by the officiating pastor, “who gives this woman to be married to this man?” Everybody laughed except his wife. The father carefully sat down next to his mother/wife. I bet that it was a long way home for him.

I remind this starry eyed couple that their lovey -dovey feeling will not last forever. I say, “There will come a day you will think, ‘Why did I ever marry this jerk?’ It is like going from ‘Hunka, hunka, burning love’ to ‘Heartbreak’ . That is when your commitment starts to love one another til death do you apart.”

Commitment is a decision to have the abundant marriage God desires, regardless of circumstances or whether you think your spouse is doing his or her part, because your marriage is an unbreakable covenant before God. Ancient Hebrew culture understood a covenant not as a contract, which could be broken, but as a binding, permanent agreement – just like the covenant God makes with us.

We often let our feelings guide our actions, but we are actually built for the opposite. Our Creator Jesus Christ has designed us so that when we love another person with our actions, our feelings inevitably follow.

The root of most marital problems is sin, and the root of all sin is selfishness. Submission to Christ and to one another is the only way to overcome selfishness, for when we submit, the Holy Spirit can fill us and enable us to love one another in a sacrificial, sanctifying, satisfying way – the way Christ loves the church.

Think about it, what wife wouldn’t support a husband who loved her as much as he loved himself and as sacrificially, tenderly, and purely as Christ loves His bride? What wife wouldn’t respect a husband who followed Christ’s gentle model of servant-leadership? Amen, ladies?

B. GIVE YOUR BEST

As I mentioned before, over twenty some years ago, our marriage was in serious trouble because I was neglecting my wife Karen by working too many hours since we

were in debt up to our eyeballs. We finally came to the point where she didn't want to be with me anymore. Did she have a biblical ground for divorce? No. But did she feel unloved? Absolutely. I was a plain jerk who didn't care for her feelings and needs. I provided things for her, but I was not much of a godly husband.

The Lord had to teach me how to love my bride. He used the Bible and used this book "Love Life" by Dr. Ed Wheat to explain it in more detail. Out of many great lessons I've learned from this book, there is one that has stuck with me. Give your spouse your BEST. BEST stands for "Bless, Edify, Share, and Touch". Let's look at them closer:

1) Bless: Bless your spouse with your word constantly without lying. Look for something good he or she does even if there are only a few, instead of bad things. Then praise him or her for the work he or she does; or how your spouse looks. Send cards in mail. Give her flowers or stick a love note in his lunch.

To keep your marriage brimming with love in the loving cup, when you're wrong, admit it; and when you're right, shut up.

14 sincere words that make marriage works:

"I am sorry," "I was wrong," "Please forgive me," "I love you," and "Yes, dear."

2) Edify: Build each other up with your word in front of your spouse and especially to other people; never talk down your spouse or about him or her to others. Tell others how you are blessed to have your spouse. Pray for your spouse to be what the Lord wants that person to be, not the way you want your spouse to be. And expect that the Lord will work on you before He works on your spouse. It can be rather painful, but worth it.

3) Share: Share your spouse's desires as your desires. Husbands, be attentive to your wife when she talks to you without watching TV, or reading newspaper, or looking at other things. Give her your full attention. That goes the same for you, wives. Honor what your spouse likes more than what you like.

Have frequent date nights. Just the two of you. You don't have to go to expensive restaurants to make your dates special. Choose to be romantic; choose to be sensitive to each other. Marriage is like riding a bike uphill, you constantly have to pedal, otherwise it will go down, and it will go down fast.

4) Touch: I am not talking about sexual touching. I am talking about physical gestures here. Winking at each other across the room; smiling at each other; squeezing a hand or shoulder when you pass by. Let each other know that you love and care.

If you are thinking, "OK, if I do what the preacher just said, our marriage will be better by next week." No, it doesn't work that way. It takes time. It took over three years for Karen to see that I was a changed man by the Lord.

If you are struggling in your marriage, DON'T YOU EVER SEEK advice from unbelievers because you will get unbiblical responses from them. Most likely they will tell you to dump him or her and start brand new. Bad advice.

C. DIVORCE

A person stuck in an unpleasant marriage thinks that there are only two options: stay married and be miserable, or go through divorce and be happy. Sounds logical? No, reality differs. Divorce often creates additional problems and pain that had formerly not existed, such as child custody, support payments, and heartbreak.

Here is what the Lord says about divorce:

Malachi 2:16 "For the Lord God of Israel says That He hates divorce, For it covers one's garment with violence," Says the Lord of hosts. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, That you do not deal treacherously."

Divorce was never to be seen as a preferred or easy option in your marriage. The Hebrew word translated divorce has as its root the idea of "a hewing off, a cutting apart" – it is the amputation of that which is one flesh.

This verse 16 gives us the clearest comment from the lips of God – He hates divorce. Marriage is a physical union – "one flesh" – and can be broken by physical causes:

1) Death

Romans 7:2-3 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. 3 So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

2) Sexual sin

Matthew 19:9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.

3) Desertion

1 Corinthians 7:15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.

God's original intent was that one man and one woman be devoted to each other in marriage for one lifetime. Divorce for reasons other than those given in Scripture, even though legal, would grieve the heart of God and being disobedient.

We had a woman in our congregation who wanted to divorce her husband without a biblical ground. She just wanted to be free from her husband so that she could get involved with someone else. When she was convicted by the Lord through the teachings from this pulpit, instead of repenting and being obedient to the Lord, she left the church and started to attend another church so that she didn't have to listen to the convicting message. That is willful disobedience.

So, am I condemning anyone who went through divorce previously and you now are happily married? No, I am not. But I am urging you to make your current marriage be the best marriage in the world by being obedient to the Lord and submit to one another.

D. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Commitment to stay in your marriage is a decision to have the abundant marriage God desires, regardless of circumstances or whether you think your spouse is doing his or her part because your marriage is an unbreakable covenant before God.
- 2) Give your spouse your BEST: Bless, Edify, Share, Touch
- 3) Biblical divorce is not mandatory, rather an option that the Lord allows.
- 4) What counts in making a happy marriage is not so much how compatible you are, but how you deal with incompatibility. – Nineteenth-century author Leo Tolstoy