

## CLEAR THE AIR: Burning Issues Confronting Christians Today

### Sermon #4: THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE (The Exceptions for Annulment/Divorce and Remarriage) Malachi 2:13-16; Matthew 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:12-15

God hates annulment/divorce, because it causes unfaithfulness to the covenant that a man and woman entered into before God, and brings harmful consequences to them and the children (Malachi 2:14-16). In Matthew 19:3-9, Christ taught that divorce is an accommodation to man's sin that violates God's original purpose for the permanence of marriage (Genesis 2:24). He taught that God's law allowed divorce only because of the hardness of our hearts (Matthew 19:8). It was a concession for the faithful partner due to sexual sin or abandonment on the part of the spouse, such that the faithful partner was no longer bound to the marriage (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:12-15).

Jesus' main point was to refute the idea that people could divorce "for any and every reason" (Matthew 19:3). But even in exceptional situations, annulment/divorce is **morally allowed – but not required**. Many couples have been able to rebuild their marriages even after adultery!

Since divorce is a concession, never God's original intention, believers should also hate divorce. With God's help, a marriage can survive the worst sins. Believers should never consider annulment/divorce (except in exceptional circumstances) and even in those circumstances it should be pursued with utmost reluctance.

#### Two Biblical Grounds for Dissolving a Marriage

- 1) UNREPENTANT ADULTERY:** Jesus used the word *porneia* (Matthew 5:32; 19:9), a general term that encompasses sexual sin, such as adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, and incest.
  - In the Old Testament, God "divorced" the northern kingdom of Israel because of idolatry, which He likened to sexual sin (Jeremiah 3:6-9).
  - Forgiveness and reconciliation between spouses is always preferable to divorce even when adultery has occurred (Matthew 18:21-22). After every attempt has been made to bring the sinning partner to repentance, the Bible permits release for the faithful partner through divorce (Matthew 5:32; 1 Corinthians 7:15).
- 2) PERMANENT ABANDONMENT:** an unbelieving spouse leaves the believing partner (1 Corinthians 7:12-15). Because "God has called us to peace" (v. 15), divorce is allowed in such situations.
  - When an unbeliever leaves, forcing him/her to stay may create greater tension and conflict. Hence Paul stated, "If the unbelieving one leaves, let him [or her] leave" (v. 15).

## Four Principles concerning Biblical Grounds for Remarriage

- 1) Remarriage is permitted for the aggrieved spouse only when the divorce was on Biblical grounds (Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39). But serious efforts should be made at reconciliation, including the intervention of the church, before he/she can remarry.
- 2) After serious efforts have been made toward reconciliation, the aggrieved spouse, together with the church leaders, may realize the marriage is irreparably broken (Matthew 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:15). In such cases remarriage is allowable for the aggrieved, if taken with serious consideration that this cuts off all possibility of a reconciliation that God may yet produce.
- 3) If the offending spouse remarries, this dissolves the former marriage so that the aggrieved spouse may be free to remarry another believer (Matthew 19:9).
- 4) The offending partner should repent and be reconciled to God and the spouse (1 Corinthians 7:11; 1 John 1:9). If it's too late because the spouse has remarried, he/she should remain single, having left their marriage without Biblical warrant (Matthew 19:9; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:11).

## HOW ABOUT UNHAPPY MARRIAGES WHERE THERE'S NO ADULTERY OR ABANDONMENT?

- 1) **Pray for your spouse.** It's difficult to harbor bitterness against someone when you're praying for that person. The more you pray, the more God will change your heart,
- 2) **Appreciate your spouse** (Proverbs 15:1) What were those things that made you fall in love? Verbalize it or put it in a letter. You'll be amazed at how kind words can save a marriage.
- 3) **Identify your real enemy. Our spouses are not the enemy** – Satan is (Ephesians 6:12). His greatest trick is to keep you blaming your spouse, while blinding you to your own faults.
- 4) **Meditate on God's Word daily.** The way to battle Satan is with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). Not only is God's Word a weapon, it is also a guide for life.
- 5) **Look at yourself.** No one is perfect (Romans 3:10). It's easy to see the mistakes our spouses have. It's harder to look inward and admit how we contributed to the problems.
- 6) **Take action to restore your marriage.** If you remove divorce as an option, there are many ways of saving a marriage: Christian counseling, intervention by church leaders, and personal forgiveness. Read articles from Christian marriage websites, read books and materials from Christian marriage experts – then apply the biblical principles.

## Final Thoughts:

Is God still "good" if He wants me to stay in a very bad marriage? Many people say divorce brings freedom. That is as false as Satan's promises to Eve in Eden. Living according to God's Word provides true freedom – the freedom of a clean conscience, freedom from the tyranny and consequences of sin, and freedom to enjoy God's love.

Even if you think you are stuck in a very bad marriage, take heart. God loves you and wants the best for you. His commands are for your good. As you read the Bible and grow in the Lord, you will discover principles to help you live with satisfaction and joy.

Stick through the hard times and work on the tough issues. Even though your present suffering is being used for your good, God has not left you without hope.