

Theological Equipping Class

Divorce and Remarriage

12/7/25

Determine the rule before establishing exceptions.

What is marriage? (see last month's TEC)

- "From the very beginning marriage was and is by virtue monogamous, an essential bond between one man and one woman, and therefore also a lifelong covenant, indissoluble by human authority." (Herman Bavinck)
- Descriptors often redefine: _____ marriage (open, gay, civil, polygamous)

No-fault marriage, irreconcilable differences, incompatibility

- "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. For a man and a woman, as such, are incompatible." (Chesterton)
- Compatibility: "a state in which two things are able to exist or occur together without trouble or conflict."
- "The differences between a man and a woman are at best so obstinate and exasperating that they practically cannot be got over unless there is an atmosphere of exaggerated tenderness and mutual interest...every woman has to find out that her husband is a selfish beast, because every man is a selfish beast by the standard of a woman. But let her find out the best while they are both still in the story of "Beauty and the Beast." Every man has to find out that his wife is cross—that is to say, sensitive to the point of madness; for every woman is mad by the masculine standard. But let him find out that she is mad while her madness is more worth considering than anyone else's sanity." (Chesterton)

Covenant or Contract

- *...the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. (Malachi 2:14)*

Stats on Divorce

- About 700-800K marriages end in divorce each year.
- About 40% of 1st, 60% of 2nd & 75% of all 3rd marriages end in divorce.
- Historic trends
 - 1910 1/10 marriages ended in divorce
 - 1920 1/7
 - 1940 1/6
 - 1960 1/4
 - 1970 1/3
 - Today: roughly 1/2 (though the increase has slowed since marriage itself has slowed)
- Women initiate over 70% of all divorces with college educated women initiating about 90% of all divorces.
- Are Christians just as likely to divorce?

Effects of divorce: poverty, suicide, depression, drug use and crime

- The social role of marriage
- “When two parties enter into a binding contract, there are penalties for failing to live up to your side of the bargain, except in a marriage covenant sworn to God in front of witnesses. Yes, business contract law is more rigidly enforced in the United States than marriage under the current NFDL regime. A society that teaches and allows a marriage covenant to be less important than a business contract will reap the fruit of social upheaval, unfettered dishonesty, lawlessness, violence towards women, war on men, and expendability of children. When marriage is merely a means of self-oriented consumption, then a person’s primary obligation is not to the family but to the self. To devalue marriage is to devalue the family is to undermine the foundation of a thriving society.” (Dusty Deevers)
- On stigma and shame
- A word of encouragement to the divorced.

A Theology of Divorce and Remarriage

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:18-24)

- a normative principle
- the cultural mandate: why man's isolation was not good and why marriage solves that "problem"
- this is the paradigmatic text on marriage! THE picture, THE foundation

Mosaic Law: regulations in a fallen world

When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

- to regulate it by restricting flippant or casual divorce.
- becomes the primary text controlling Jewish thought on divorce & remarriage to the time of Jesus.

Hillel vs. Shammai: inter-rabbinical debate in the first century

- "The school of Shammai says a man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her, for it is written because he hath found in her indecency in anything."
- "The school of Hillel says he may divorce her even if she spoiled a dish for him, for it is written because he hath found in her indecency in anything."

And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them. And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." (Mark 10:1-12)

- Which team are you on?
- What did Moses command?
- Why was Deuteronomy 24 written?
- whoever divorces and remarries commits adultery: remarriage compounds the sin of divorce
- this holds for men and women (counter-cultural)

Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery. (Luke 16:18)

- context?
 - *But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void. (Luke 16:17)*
- Lukan twist: he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery
- Making explicit what was already implied

Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." But he said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it." (Matthew 19:1-12)

- “The Matthean Exception”
 - *It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:31–32)*
 - “but I say to you”
 - Tightens, doesn’t relax the Law
 - “everyone who divorces his wife makes her commit adultery.”
 - “Lo, thou art free to marry any man.” (certificate of divorce)
- What's the exception? Except for sexual immorality (*porneia*)
 1. Forbidden marriages
 2. Marriages during betrothal period
 3. Adultery: the Erasmian position
- Does this open the door for other exceptions?
 - *"whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, & marries another, commits adultery."*
- Summary of the gospels
 - First, Jesus says that if we want to understand the design of marriage, we need to look at its original institution which is found in Genesis 1-2.
 - Second, we see that the original intent is a one flesh relationship with should not be severed.
 - Third, we see that severing the relationship thru divorce is sin and that subsequent remarriage only compounds the sin with more sin.
 - Fourth, we see that the divorcer and divorced and the one who marries the divorcee are all addressed.
 - Fifth, we see that there is one and only one exception and that is porneia which can linguistically mean and has been historically understood to refer to forbidden marriages like incest, premarital fornication, or adultery.

Pauline passages:

- Ephesians 5: marriage as a parable and picture of the gospel
- Romans 7: marriage lasts unto death

To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? (1 Corinthians 7:10–16)

- “I, not the Lord”
- General rule is upheld
- Not giving permission to seek divorce
- Is this “another” exception?
 - Jesus and Paul are addressing different circumstances and thus answering different questions.
- What does “separates” mean? Can that be interpreted as emotional or figurative abandonment?
 - First, the meaning of the word "separate" doesn't square with a metaphorical or spiritual interpretation of the text.
 - *And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me...” (Acts 1:4)*
 - *After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them... (Acts 18:1–2)*
 - Second, the meaning of the phrase "live with" suggests a physical desertion rather than an emotional, spiritual, or otherwise metaphorical desertion.
 - Third, the relationship between desertion and divorce suggests that a physical view rather than mere metaphor is in view.
 - Most powerfully, 1 Corinthians 7:12-13 says that "...if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, *and she consents to live with him*, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and *he consents to live with her*, she should not divorce him" (1 Corinthians 7:12–13).

- Trial separations?
- Spectrum of views:
 - divorce is never permitted and remarriage is never permitted
 - divorce may be permitted in certain scenarios (adultery and abandonment), but remarriage is never permitted
 - Christians may never pursue divorce, but if their spouse divorces them without cause, they are free to remarry.
 - the Erasmian view: divorce and remarriage is allowed though not required in cases of adultery or abandonment
- What about other exceptions?

Concluding thoughts

1. Anytime we approach ethics and morality, we need to begin with the general rule.
2. Hard cases make bad laws.
3. We need to beware the reductionistic tendency of our modern age.
4. There are some gray areas that are difficult and controversial to figure out. But don't miss the forest for the trees.

An exhortation to endure!

- *This is a hard saying; who can listen to it? (John 6:60)*
- *The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." (Matthew 19:10)*
- *Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given...Let the one who is able to receive this receive it. (Matthew 19:11-12)*