

“Disciples Glorify God in Marriage”

Matthew 5:31-32

Of all the sensitive subjects that Jesus deals with in the Sermon on the Mount, the one that He addresses in these two verses is perhaps the most difficult to deal with--marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Divorce is one of the most prevalent and widespread problems in our culture today, and this is even true within the context of the church.

There was a 2010 Pew Research survey that asked the American public if marriage was becoming obsolete. An astounding 40% of respondents said yes. Among those in the traditional marrying age range (18-29), the number was four points higher at 44%. This same survey, “The Decline of Marriage and Rise of New Families,” recorded a number of other shocking statistics about the deteriorating state of marriage and the family in our nation. For instance, in 1960, 72% of all adults and 68% of people in their twenties were married. By 2008, those numbers had dropped to 52% and 26% respectively.

Given the current state of affairs in our society, it is all too obvious the concept of marriage and the family that most people have nowadays is in stark contrast to God’s design. It is indeed no trivial matter when four-in-ten people agree that the most basic institution of society is becoming obsolete and antiquated.

Marriage is a challenge. It takes work and is not easy.

The issues that are associated with marital breakup are serious because, not only do they sever a long-standing relationship, but also because they affect so many people.

I’ve heard that as many as 8 in 10 people have been either directly or indirectly affected by divorce. For many people, the mere mention of this subject is a painful reminder of wounds from the past and brings up memories and feelings that they’d rather forget.

Yet the fact remains that marriage is under attack in our generation. Why does marriage seem to be in so much trouble today?

Christianity Today - *“I believe marriage is in trouble today because society and the church have a faulty view of it, a deified myth of this human, delightful, yet flawed institution. Though fertility gods have been dethroned by the advance of Christianity, today’s culture seems to be resurrecting them in a more palatable form. Most voices today laud a romantic image of marriage as life’s ultimate true source of joy. What is the result? The result is a crash, thousands of crashes...In reality, every marriage faces conflict, misunderstanding, smashed fantasies, and bruised egos. Any real marriage held up against the yard stick of total joy will*

measure short. And if relationships that are meant to give total joy fail, the lives of the people who are in them are often shattered.”

Many people get married with an illusion of what they think marriage is. They have Hollywood’s idea of a marriage where there is no conflict, problems, or disappointments.

The world’s idea of marriage says that getting married is all about you getting your needs met. God has a very different idea of marriage, one that is not focused on GETTING, rather is focused on GIVING.

As Christ’s disciples, we must see marriage through His eyes.

The teaching that Jesus gives here is totally out of sync with the culture we live in. In many ways, marriage has been trivialized to nothing more than a shallow relationship that dissolves when one’s romantic feelings give out.

David Jeremiah - *“The root of our problems is found in the statement so often made when someone decides to get married: ‘I’ve found someone to make me happy.’ Marriage is not about making ourselves happy. It’s about making someone else happy. It’s about finding someone you can devote your life to serving.”*

Jesus addresses the subject of marriage and divorce here in this section of the Sermon on the Mount and gives us some rich truth that runs counter-cultural and opposite of what we so frequently hear.

1. Divorce was never part of God’s original design

“It was also said, Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.”

If ever there was a day when divorce was more rampant than today, it could very well have been during Jesus’ day.

The Pharisees interpreted Old Testament law in such a way that they taught that divorce was permissible on any grounds. The only thing that was required was that a certificate of divorce be given. This happened with such frequency that they were known to even carry around these certificates with them wherever they went.

John MacArthur - *“By that period of Jewish history divorce had become so easy and casual that a man could dismiss his wife for such trivial things as burning his meal or embarrassing him in front of his friends. Often the husband did not bother to give a reason, since none was required.”*

The law was used as a justification for this practice.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 - “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 later 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.”

Jesus is showing how this was a misinterpretation and abuse by the Pharisees.

What does Jesus have to say about this issue?

Matthew 19:3-9 - “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 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 the hardness of your 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.”

God designed marriage to be a permanent union between one man and one woman who are committed God and each other for the rest of their lives.

The instruction that God’s Word gives on divorce cannot be properly understood apart its instruction on marriage.

Genesis 2:23-25 - “Then the man said, This is at last 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. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”

“**Hold Fast**” - translated as ‘cleave’ in older translations; word in Hebrew means to cling, stick, cleave, or hold together

It was God who performed the first marriage when He brought Eve to Adam. Marriage was God's plan, not man's plan. Every couple who has ever been married participates in a union that was established by the Creator Himself.

Maggie Gallagher (President of the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, Chairwoman of the National Organization for Marriage) - *"I think it's important to recognize that marriage is a virtually universal human social institution. It exists in just about every known human society...yet it has a certain basic and recognizable shape. Marriage as a universal human idea is always a public union, not just a private and personal one. It's a sexual union...between a man and a woman...in which the rights and responsibilities of the man and the woman towards each other and towards their children are publicly defined and supported. We don't just leave it up to a bunch of adolescents in the middle of romantic, erotic, emotional drama to work out on their own what this whole big dimension of human experience means...There aren't that many human universals...and you have to ask yourself, 'Why?' Why is it that human beings, over and over again in all these wildly diverse societies--in the steppes of Asia and the jungles of the Amazon and the deserts of Africa, completely disconnected by religion, by economy, by culture, by history--why do human beings keep coming up with this same basic marriage idea?"*

The answer lies in the fact that marriage is God's idea and is an integral part of the glue that holds human society together.

- Marriage as God intended is the PRINCIPAL building block of our society
- Marriage as God intended is a PARTNERSHIP between one man and one woman
- Marriage as God intended is a PERMANENT union for life
- Marriage as God intended PROVIDES beautiful unity between a husband and wife
- Marriage as God intended is for the PURPOSE of procreation and glorifying God
- Marriage as God intended is a beautiful PICTURE of the relationship that Christ has with His church

Ephesians 5:22-33 - **"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in**

splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

In marriage, God brings a husband and wife together in a physical and spiritual bond that reaches into the depths of their soul. As God designed it, marriage is to be the welding together of two people into one unit, the blending of two minds, two wills, two sets of emotions, two spirits, and two personalities.

God intends for this to be a permanent relationship as long as both partners are alive.

2. Divorce is permissible only on the grounds of sexual immorality

“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.”

Marital problems all began with what took place in Genesis 3! Satan didn't attack Adam when he was alone in the garden. The enemy launched his assault only after Adam and Eve were there together, thereby attacking the building block for human society.

John MacArthur - *“Man's first sin brought a separation from God, a separation of man and nature, and a separation of husband and wife.”*

Sin spread like a cancer and affected every single part of humanity, and this includes relationships and the most sacred of relationships such as marriage. Because sin entered the picture, marriage has become difficult.

When the pressure mounts, divorce seems like an easy solution to the problem. Yet this would be the equivalent of cutting off your arm all because you have a splinter in your finger. Instead of dealing with problems and relying on the power and grace of God, we want an easy escape.

The most recent divorce figures from CDC were for 2011:

- 6.8 marriages out of every 1,000 people

- 3.6 divorces out of every 1,000 people for a rate of 53%
- The divorce rate after 2nd marriages is between 60-67%
- The divorce rate after 3rd marriages is between 73-74%
- Children of divorced parents are prone to divorcing 4 times more than the children of couples who are not divorced

These statistics show that divorce doesn't make things any easier. In reality, they make things much more difficult as new problems arise as a result.

In a generation that was known for its no-fault divorce, Jesus says that divorce is permissible only on the ground sexual immorality, adultery, and infidelity. The Pharisees saw the paperwork as the only issue at stake in the subject of divorce; Jesus shows how it is a matter of heart-work and not paperwork.

“Sign the papers...”

In a way that shattered their way of thinking, Jesus said that every single time a man divorced his wife without proper cause and turned her loose to remarry someone else, he was forcing her into an adulterous situation. The man who married the former wife was guilty of adultery as well.

Jesus wants us to know the seriousness of this issue in God's eyes and as His disciples, we are to live radically different lives, have radically different homes, and radically different marriages where He is Lord.

In no way is divorce commanded in this text, but merely permitted to protect the offended spouse. This was the sole purpose of divorce laws in the Old Testament. They protected the woman from being taken advantage of.

Remarriage is possible for those who have been divorced under biblical grounds.

However, this truth strikes at the heart of the no-fault divorce mentality of our current generation. The idea of irreconcilable differences and incompatible personalities may be cultural grounds for divorce, but they are not biblical grounds. God's standards are very different than the world's standards.

Many look for a way OUT instead of a way THROUGH their problems. Divorce seems to be an easy way out and a quick solution.

3. God hates divorce, but loves people

Jesus shows us the seriousness of divorce because He wants us to know something of the deep love of God for us as being those who are made in His image.

Scripture is clear in its assertion that God hates divorce.

Malachi 2:13-16 - “And this is the second thing you do: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. 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.”

That God hates divorce only shows the fact that He loves people and desires for us to be spared the pain that goes along with it.

God hates divorce because He doesn’t want precious children having to be shuffled back and forth between two families.

God hates divorce because He sees the pain of memories that have been shattered and the hurt that comes from what were once shared lives that are now no longer shared.

God hates divorce because of the pain and agony that accompanies what once was a beautiful relationship that has since crumbled into a pile of broken pieces.

God hates divorce because He hates that which destroys us.

The cross stands as a perpetual reminder of how much God hates sin and loves us. Jesus suffered in our place and took upon Himself the pain of God’s judgment on sin so that we could be forgiven. Jesus paid the price for my sin. He bore the full weight of guilt, and now, there is no condemnation for the one who trusts in Him.

We need gospel-centered homes and gospel-centered marriages.

USA Today (March 14, 2011) - “Glenn Stanton of Focus on the Family wrote a recent column in Baptist Press highlighting Wright’s interpretation of the state of divorce for Christians. “The

divorce rates of Christian believers are not identical to the general population—not even close,” he wrote. “Being a committed, faithful believer makes a measurable difference in marriage.”

Practical Principles to Apply

- Be GRATEFUL; If your marriage is in a good place now, be sure to thank God. Each of us could be in the midst of marital pain and anguish.
- Be GRACIOUS; Do not judge those who are struggling or have experienced a divorce. We often shoot our wounded.
- Be GUIDED; If your marriage is struggling, get help now. Surrender your pride.
- Be GUARDED; If you are planning on getting married, make it a matter of intense prayer. Most divorces start before the ceremony begins.
- Be GODLY; If you are violating God’s law of marriage and purity, stop it now.