

LESSON 11

THE QUESTION OF DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Introduction

During the past several years, the number of divorces has been increasing at an alarming rate. Crumbling marriages and broken homes should be signs of alarm to any nation. The mental, emotional, and spiritual health of every society depends on the stability of the home, for the future generation of each society gains its training and values primarily from the home. If the adults of tomorrow are exposed constantly to instability, anger, hatred, rejection, and insecurity caused by conflict between parents, their development into mature, secure, and stable persons will be hindered.

Divorce is the result, not the cause, of failure. It is caused by a breakdown in character and the failure of a couple to make necessary adjustments for experiencing a satisfactory degree of happiness in life. Divorce often involves couples who did not receive adequate pre-marital counselling, who have not sought marital counselling, and who have failed to develop compatible interests and values for their marriage. Without common interests and values, a couple tends to go in opposite directions.

Pastors are often called upon to counsel couples who are experiencing conflict and are contemplating divorce. As counsellors, they frequently find significant differences between their understanding of biblical teachings on divorce and remarriage and the current sociological and psychological approaches to these issues. Their dilemma is at the point of dealing redemptively with persons caught in a marriage conflict which is insoluble while holding to the teachings of Jesus and Paul concerning a high ethical ideal for marriage and a standard of no divorce. This ideal maintains a continual challenge and high standard for the Church. On the other hand, pastors are faced with ministering to persons who have failed in the area of marriage and have fallen far below the ideal standard. What should be their message of hope to persons whose lives are broken by defeat and divorce?

Old Testament Teachings

The high ideal of monogamous marriage for life was not followed in much of the Old Testament. Numerous leaders of Israel did not maintain the high ethical standards of Jesus nor even the basic ethical requirements which they knew from the Old Testament.

[Empty box for student response]

Divorce is caused by a breakdown in
c _____ and the failure to make
necessary a _____.
List three factors that often contribute to
divorce.
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
(Compare your answers with the text.)

What is the dilemma which pastors face in
counselling persons contemplating divorce?

(Compare your answer with the text.)

[Empty box for student response]

In Genesis 2:24, marriage is described as a man's leaving his father and mother and cleaving to his wife, "and they shall be one flesh." They are bound in a unity that contributes to the fulfilment and meaning of each. This ideal was not maintained very long. It was violated when Abraham took more than one wife. God had promised him that he would be the father of many nations; yet, his wife Sarah was barren. Sarah and Abraham compromised the intent of Genesis 2:24 and followed the customs of their society; Sarah provided her maid Hagar as a secondary wife for Abraham to bear children for him (Gen. 16:1-4). When Hagar conceived and bore a child, she no longer was satisfied to be a maid but apparently desired to replace Sarah as the primary wife of Abraham. Sarah realized her mistake and feared that she would lose the loyalty of her husband. Abraham permitted Sarah to send Hagar from the home.

The example of having multiple wives by Abraham, the father of the nation, became an acceptable standard for Israel's patriarchs. Jacob, by whose name the people became known as Israelites, had many wives who gave birth to the leaders of the twelve tribes. The climax of this polygamous practice was reached in Solomon who had 700 wives and 300 concubines.

A second breakdown of the monogamous ideal of one man and one woman forming a one-flesh union came in a father's taking back his daughter from her husband and giving her to another man. Samson saw a woman in Timnath, a daughter of a Philistine, who pleased him. He demanded that his father make arrangements for her to be his wife. Later, "Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he had used as his friend" (Judg.14:20). David had a similar experience when Saul, father of David's wife Michal, concluded that she was not being treated properly and gave her to another man (1 Sam. 25:44).

There are also examples in which the wife left the husband and returned to the father. She initiated the separation and broke the one-flesh relationship; however, she could not initiate the divorce since that privilege belonged only to the husband in the Hebrew culture. If the woman separated and refused to return to her husband, he initiated divorce.

There is no record of the beginning of divorce in Israel, but Moses was impelled to give laws which restricted divorcements and gave protection to women. Apparently divorce became acceptable and was practised widely, and many wives were being abused. The husband could treat his wife according to his own desires, while she had no prerogative to initiate divorce even if she was being abused. The man had the liberty of putting aside his wife for any petty reason.

The law giving some regulation to divorce is stated in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. However, the intent of the passage was not to give a law permitting divorce but to prohibit a woman who had been divorced and

As you read the first four paragraphs on this page, note three examples of Old Testament violation of the intent of Genesis 2:24.

Abraham and other patriarchs took more than one _____.

(wife)

Another Old Testament violation of the ideal of Genesis 2:24 was when a father took back his _____ from her _____ and gave her to another.

(daughter, husband)

A third example of Old Testament violation of Genesis 2:24 was when the _____ left her _____ and returned to her father.

(wife, husband)

later remarried from returning to her first husband: "Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the Lord" (Deut. 24:4). This passage does recognize divorce as a practice but does not indicate that God instituted or commanded it. It implies rather that God tolerated it, and Moses placed some restrictions on the man for the protection of his divorced wife: he was to place a document in her hand which stated the reason she was put away. Society also permitted her to marry another man.

The enactment in Deuteronomy placed formal requirements on the relation of the husband and wife and regulated the causes for which he could put her away. He could not send her away in a moment of anger but had to justify his reason in a written document. If he divorced her for some reason other than adultery, he was accountable to her father. On the other hand, the divorce legislation protected the husband in the event his wife committed adultery. He was given the right to send her away.

Fathers arranged for the marriages of their children (see Gen. 24; 29; 34). In an agrarian culture, aging parents were dependent on their sons for support. The oldest son was given a double portion of the inheritance because he was responsible for his parents until their death. However, the daughters may have had also a part in their support through the marriage gift or bride price. When a daughter married, a bride price was arranged by her father. Ordinarily, two-thirds of the bride price was paid by the bridegroom to her father. If they stayed married, he was not required to pay the other third. If he divorced her for any reason other than adultery, he was required to pay the other third of the bride price. The bill of divorcement stated the reason and thus protected the husband in his dealings with his wife's father.

The man who had a good cause to put away his wife could go before a public official, set forth his grounds, and then an official document was written and given to the woman. Under certain circumstances, a woman could not be divorced. If she was seduced by a man, he was forced to marry her and could not put her away (Deut. 22:28-29).

Towards the end of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi reveals that Israel knew that divorce was below God's intention. Divorce had been commanded by Ezra of Israelites who had married pagan women when the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity. Malachi protested the custom. He pointed out that the Israelites covered the altar with tears and groanings because Yahweh no longer accepted their ceremonial worship. He gave as Yahweh's reason:

Because the Lord was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Has

The intent of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was:

1. Not to give a law permitting _____.
2. To prohibit a divorced women who has _____ from returning to her first _____.
3. Not to recognize divorce as a _____.
4. To indicate that God did not institute or command divorce but rather _____ it.
5. To place some restrictions on man to protect his _____ wife.

(Compare your answers with the first paragraph which begins on the previous page.)

Finish reading this paragraph, which continues on the next page, before doing the following.

Malachi told the Israelites that God no longer accepted their ceremonial worship because:

1. The men had been faithless and were putting away the _____ of their youth.
2. God hates _____.

(1. wives, 2. divorce)

not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. "For I hate divorce, says the Lord the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless." (Mal. 2:13-16, RSV)

At the time of Malachi, divorce and remarriage were practised widely in Israel. Although the laws permitted both, they were displeasing to God. It appears that older Jewish men were putting away their Jewish wives of their youth and were marrying younger pagan women.

Punishment for violating the marriage bonds changed from Old Testament to New Testament times. In the Old Testament, adultery was considered to be very serious. A bride who was not found to be a virgin at her marriage was to be stoned to death (Deut. 22:20f.). If a married woman was caught in the act of adultery, both she and the man would be put to death. Roman domination in New Testament times prevented the law of stoning adulteresses from being carried out (see John 8:1-11).

New Testament Teachings

The example of John the Baptist

John the Baptist came under the wrath of Herod because he spoke against Herod's taking his half-brother's wife after she was divorced. John upheld the law that forbade a man's taking his brother's wife while he was still alive (Lev. 18:16; 20:21; Matt. 14:4ff.). John was put to death for his stand.

Jesus' teachings on divorce

Shammai and Hillel were two famous rabbis whose interpretations of the Old Testament were respected at the time of Christ. Rabbi Shammai interpreted the words "if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house" (Deut. 24:1, RSV) to mean that the indecency referred to adultery which constituted the only grounds for divorce. Hillel and his followers interpreted these words to mean anything that the wife does with which the husband is not pleased is sufficient grounds for divorce. He argued that since another law contained the penalty of death for adultery, Deuteronomy 24 would not contradict it by allowing an adulterous wife to get by with a bill of divorcement which permitted her to remarry.

Pharisees raised with Jesus the debatable question which Shammai and Hillel had been unable to solve in order to trap Him and to find some grounds of

1. In the Old Testament, adultery was punishable by _____.
2. Roman domination in New Testament times prevented the death penalty for _____.

(1. death, 2. adultery)

Write S after Shammai's interpretation and H after Hillel's interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1.

1. Indecency referred to adultery. _____
2. Indecency referred to anything that displeased the husband. _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Hillel's argument was that another law provided the penalty of _____ for adultery; therefore, Deuteronomy 24 would be contradictory if it permitted _____ and _____ of the adulterer.

(death, divorce, remarriage)

accusation against Him. The accounts of the encounter in Mark 10 and Matthew 19 have several significant differences. According to Mark 10:2, the Pharisees asked Jesus, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him." According to Matthew 19:3, they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" According to Matthew 19, Jesus gave one cause in answer to the lawfulness of a man's putting away his wife "for every cause." This one cause is expressed in the "except for fornication" clause, of verse 9.

The answer to the question in Mark's Gospel is a simple "no." When Jesus asked the Pharisees what Moses wrote, they answered with Deuteronomy 24:1-4 in mind. Jesus responded from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, another section of Moses: "But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:6-9). Jesus was aware that God's intention is expressed in Genesis while Deuteronomy 24 is His permission for an enactment that limited the extent of an abuse being practised in the land.

Divorce was permitted only because of man's blindness, sinfulness, and unteachableness (Mark 10:5). God's design of the physical natures of man and woman is His plan and method for their joining together to become one flesh. This interpretation was followed by Paul who indicated that a man having immoral relations with a harlot becomes one flesh with her (1 Cor. 6:15-18). Man is not to destroy his unity in marriage by a bill of divorcement (Mark 10:9). Perhaps the "except clause" in Matthew recognizes that the only sin which destroys the oneness of flesh is adultery. According to Matthew 19:9, a man who puts away his wife for causes other than fornication and marries another commits adultery with her, and whoever marries the woman put away commits adultery also.

Difficulty arises in establishing a standard concerning divorce and remarriage because of the differences in Mark and Matthew. Some scholars believed that the "except clause" in Matthew was a later addition. Other scholars conclude that Jesus permitted the remarriage of the innocent party. It should be remembered that Jesus was not giving in these passages a systematic explanation of His position on divorce and remarriage. He was responding to a question which was designed to trap Him. Perhaps He was saying that, rather than arguing about a way to get out of marriage, attention should focus on the divine intent and purpose for marriage.

Jesus taught that citizens of the Kingdom of God who live under the control of God's Spirit are not to divorce. However, kingdom citizens continue to live in a world of sin and hardness of heart where divorce is permitted. Because of the carnal nature of man,

According to Mark, Jesus said that a man could not put away his wife for _____ cause. He could put her away for one cause: that cause was _____.

(every, fornication)

The "except clause" in Matthew 19 recognizes that God designed the physical natures of man and woman so that they could be joined together as one; therefore only _____ can destroy this oneness.

(adultery)

even those claiming new birth do not always escape hardness of heart and sin. The ideal for kingdom citizens and church members is no divorce, but the practical situation of the Church's ministering in a sinful world and proclaiming God's mercy and forgiveness keeps the question in tension.

Paul's teachings on divorce and remarriage

Paul seemed to support the position set forth in Mark's Gospel rather than Matthew's. Paul stated that the Lord commanded, "Let not the wife depart from her husband: but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife" (1 Cor. 7:10-11). Paul did advise that if an unbelieving mate was not willing to continue living with a believer, then the unbeliever may depart. He did not advise divorce and remarriage but only separation if religious convictions led to incompatibility.

The Stand of the Church

Variations

The high ideal set forth as a standard in the New Testament is no divorce, but the good news of the Kingdom is the message of redemption for those who have fallen below the high ideal. Kingdom citizens who are indwelt by the power of God and are submitted to the will of God should live according to the high ideal. However, when the carnal nature regains control of the believer's life, he may revert to the standards of this world which accept divorce and remarriage.

The state of marriage is not just a Christian but a universal institution. Both Christians and non-Christians enter into the marriage relationship. Natural law and social structures require that marriage be a monogamous union. Sin and lust cause many to go against their higher natures, society, and the teachings of Christianity. All men are created by God and are responsible for maintaining His requirements concerning marriage and other areas. Man in rebellion rejects God's commandments; the Christian has turned from rebellion to submission and accepts and seeks to obey His commandments. All men are responsible for a monogamous union and no divorce; Christians are expected to maintain that standard.

After Christians or non-Christians break their marriage vows, because of the hardness of heart, are they to continue a life of loneliness and defeat, or is there a message of forgiveness and hope? The Church as a whole has not been able to agree on the position it will take: whether it will adopt a standard which corresponds to God's high ideal or whether it will emphasize grace and accept members who have disobeyed and failed to follow God's will. Denominations take various positions on whether or not they will marry divorcees.

Paul taught:

1. If a marriage partner leaves the other partner, he or she is to remain u _____ or be r _____.
2. There may be a separation if an u _____ does not desire to live any longer with a b _____, but there is to be no d _____ or r _____.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Are these statements true or false?

1. Marriage is a Christian institution and is binding only for Christians. _____
2. All are created by God who instituted marriage; therefore all are responsible for a monogamous union. _____

(1. false, 2. true)

The position of the Roman Catholic Church is clear. Marriage is a sacrament of the Church, and the dissolution of a marriage, when both partners have been baptized or when marriage has been physically consummated, is not allowed. The only exceptions are annulment when a marriage is proved invalid and dispensation from a non-consummated marriage by the pope when there is just cause (danger of scandal, proof of impotence, proof of contagious disease, or an invalid marriage).

Arguments for marrying divorcees

Protestants vary with respect to divorce. Some orthodox groups deny the right to divorce, and liberal groups allow divorce and will remarry such persons. Some of the reasons given to justify divorce and remarriage, even though Jesus taught no divorce, are:

1. The Church's task is to minister to people. If the pastor does not marry them, some other person will and the opportunity to minister to them will be hindered.
2. It is inconsistent to refuse to marry divorcees while accepting them into the membership of a church.
3. All other sins can be forgiven except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Why should divorcement be considered a greater sin than others?
4. Jesus placed human needs above institutions and regulations.
5. He did not condemn the adulteress and gave her a second chance.
6. When a husband and wife are detrimental to each other's personality and ruining the chances of their children's having a normal life, Jesus would not deny divorce.
7. Marriage is not a sacrament but is legally controlled by the civil court; therefore, as the mores of the community change with regard to acceptance of divorce so should the church's position.

Arguments against marrying divorcees

Although arguments for the remarriage of divorced persons should not be taken lightly, the person who accepts the Bible as the authoritative Word of God faces serious difficulties. Many give the following reasons for not marrying divorced persons:

1. Jesus answered "no divorce" when asked if it is lawful for a man to put away his wife.

After you have read the arguments which are used to justify divorce and remarriage, list them briefly in your own words.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

After reading the arguments against marrying divorcees, list them briefly in your own words.

1. _____

2. Even though Jesus did not give a systematic treatment of the question of divorce and remarriage, Paul did deal with the question of what members of the church at Corinth should do, and he did not allow divorce—only separation.
3. Divorce cannot be considered redemptive; at best, it is an escape from an intolerable situation.
4. The Church is not to be influenced by the world but to sacrifice in influencing the world.
5. The home is the basic and most important institution of society. If the home degenerates, the Church and nation will degenerate. The home must be protected and its high standard maintained.
6. Although Jesus forgave all sins, the condition was repentance which meant turning from and giving up the sin. If remarriage of a divorced person involves adultery, then the person has not repented as long as he continues in the second marriage relationship.

Valid arguments are presented on both sides of the question. It is very difficult for a minister and church to find a consistent position that is both true to the Bible and compassionate to those with broken lives.

Guiding Principles

There are two guiding principles which should be considered when a church seeks to determine its position concerning whether it will marry divorcees: (1) a church must maintain high standards which will influence society rather than being influenced by society; and (2) a church must find ways to minister to those with broken lives. If a church does not maintain, by its actions, the position that divorce is wrong, society as a whole will suffer and more individuals will bear the consequences. On the other hand, individuals who already have been plunged into the tragedy of failure and heartbreak as a result of divorce need a ministry of healing.

Some ministers and churches have taken the position that divorcees who have remarried are forgiven and can be accepted into church membership; however, they are not to be elected to positions of leadership which would portray to the community that the church has approved of divorce and remarriage. This position has been criticized as inconsistent, discriminatory, and cruel to those who have had unfortunate experiences. The Church tends to forget that as the suffering servant it can maintain purity and be obedient only through suffering and sacrifice. Also, the forgiveness of sin

Continue listing briefly the arguments against marrying divorcees.

2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Two principles a church should consider in determining whether to marry divorcees are:

1. A church must maintain standards which will influence society rather than being i _____ by s _____.
2. A church must minister to those with b _____ lives.

(1. influenced, society; 2. broken)

removes eternal condemnation but does not erase personal and social scars. For example, the murderer can be forgiven but cannot be returned in society and in his own personal experience to the state of not having murdered. Instead, forgiveness means that he finds acceptance, love, and opportunity for a new beginning, but his life will always experience some personal and social limitations because of his past deed. The same is true for the converted alcoholic, prostitute, divorcee, and others.

The Church must maintain a tension between demanding righteousness and being willing to forgive. God is righteous, and "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). The believer must remember that freedom from condemnation comes "to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1). Such Scriptures as these do not allow the Church to base its position only on God's love and willingness to forgive. It must maintain a position which includes both God's demands for righteous living and His willingness to forgive: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners [ungodly and unrighteous], Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

The spiritual state of the remarried

The disturbing question whether a second marriage while a former companion is still living constitutes a continuing sin of adultery needs further elaboration. According to Mark, Jesus said that it is not lawful for a man to put away his wife because whoever puts her away and marries another commits adultery. Adultery seems to be the one sin which destroys the one-flesh relationship and unity in marriage. Perhaps Mark's Gospel is saying that if a bill of divorcement for causes other than adultery is given to a wife and she is permitted to remarry, her remarriage is an act of adultery against the first relationship.

According to Matthew, permission to remarry is implied for the "innocent" party who divorces because of unfaithfulness on the part of his or her companion. Since the first relationship has already been broken by adultery, the second marriage would not involve adultery. Only adultery invalidates the one flesh in marriage. If adultery was not the grounds for divorce (Mark's presupposition), then the consummation of the second marriage would be an adulterous act against the previous marriage; the adultery, rather than the bill of divorcement made by man, would destroy the validity of that marriage. The initial marital act which destroyed the first marriage would be sin, but perhaps a continuation within the second union would not incur additional sin. This interpretation seems to agree with the biblical emphasis that adultery rather than a bill of divorcement dissolves the unity of marriage. The Bible does not, however, teach that a

The Church must maintain a tension between demanding righteousness and being willing to forgive. Give two Scriptures in Romans which emphasize the demand for righteousness.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Apparently Jesus was saying in Mark that a man who puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery because her remarriage is an act of _____ against the first _____.

(adultery, relationship)

couple is required to separate because of an unfaithful act of one of them.

This interpretation suggests that a minister's performing a wedding ceremony for persons who do not have biblical grounds for divorce encourages the sin of dissolution of the first marriage, a responsibility few ministers desire to assume. Persons who have remarried can be forgiven of the sin of dissolution and may be received into the church fellowship. Some churches follow this approach in attempting to maintain the high standard of marriage while ministering spiritually to those who have failed.

Concepts Affecting Marriage,
Divorce, and Remarriage

Sexual union

Sexual union consummates the marriage, and adultery severs the union. This view has been set forth in the previous section. It is based on such Scriptures as Genesis 24:67: "Then Isaac brought her into the tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her" (RSV). If a man forced an unbetrothed virgin to have relations with him, he was required to pay the bride price to the father and could not divorce her later (Deut. 22:28-29). Additional Scriptures, such as "they shall be one flesh," have been discussed in previous sections.

Sexual union is not the sum total of marriage but expresses the intimate relation and responsible commitment of partners to each other.

Covenant

This view focuses on the vows as the heart of marriage. A couple covenants under God to live together until separated by death. This covenant has similarities to God's covenant with Israel which involved Israel in personal responsibility to God and participation in His new community. The covenant required complete and undeviating loyalty to the Lord. It was based not on legal necessity but personal commitment. Marriage is not simply a civil contract between a man and a woman but is a covenant made before God and cannot be broken. Remarriage is never permissible according to this view as long as the first spouse is living.

Relationship

Much current writing emphasizes the happy relation of the man and woman as the foundation of marriage. This relationship is often described as love which may vary from erotic feelings and romance to the level of sacrificial concern of agape. Usually those with psychological orientation hold this view and may or may not relate it to the covenant concept. Satisfactory relations are based on compatibility; therefore,

In dealing with the tension of righteousness and forgiveness, some churches take this stance:

- 1. A minister's performing the wedding ceremony of those who do not have biblical grounds for divorce encourages dissolution of the first _____.*
- 2. Persons who have remarried can be forgiven of _____ and received into the _____ fellowship.*

(Compare your answers with the text.)

As you read Concepts Affecting Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage, note three concepts of marriage.

- 1. Sexual union expresses the intimate _____ and responsible _____ of partners to each other.*

(relation, commitment)

Marriage is a covenant between two before God to live together until separated by _____.

(death)

Marriage is a relationship based on _____.

(compatibility)

relationship emphasizes intention more than covenant. Extreme patterns of this view today allow couples or groups to begin living together without the ceremony and permit the termination of marriage when compatibility no longer exists. The marriage arrangement continues only as long as interpersonal relationships are mutually satisfactory. According to this view, divorce is dissolving of a relationship rather than breaking a covenant, and remarriage is simply establishing a new relationship.

Commitment to God's will

Marriage involves elements of all three preceding views; however, Christian marriage involves a spiritual dimension that is not included in these concepts. Relationship is basic to personality and forms an important part of the structure of marriage but is an expression of rather than the foundation of marriage. The foundation of all of life must be the will of God rather than personal pleasure. Proper relationships are established when each party is controlled by God's will and expresses Christian attitudes. Sexual union is an expression of God's will along with the covenant commitment of a man and woman to one another.

Since man and woman share with God in creation through sexual intercourse, this experience binds them together with their Creator and must be expressed within the responsibility of a covenant commitment and according to the will of the Creator. Sexual unfaithfulness reflects rebellion against God and the dissolution of the covenant between a man and a woman. Sexual union as the consummation of marriage is more than physical relation; it represents the union of the deeper natures of man and woman according to God's plan. Adultery signifies separation of the deeper natures of man and woman and alienation from God. The Hebrew unitary view of the soul and body does not conceive of physical actions as separate from the deeper spiritual being.

The Trauma of Divorce

Emotional disturbances

Couples experiencing conflict often think only of being released from their unhappy marriage. Their frustrations from living together prevent them from looking ahead to what it will be like after they separate. It has been mentioned previously that divorce results from defeat and failure. Certain psychological effects begin working before divorce is completed, but the full impact of these effects is not evident until after divorce.

Persons who divorce feel guilty for having failed. They have been unable to succeed in marriage even though they were made with the capacity and desire for it. They feel guilty about many things they

Marriage is primarily a commitment to God's

(will)

One emotional response to divorce is

a _____.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

did and accuse themselves of things which they might have done. "The divorcee usually blames himself for causing the behavior in his mate which led to the conflicts which finally brought about the dissolution of the marriage."¹ Guilt may reach back even to events that took place before the marriage, such as pre-marital affairs or hostility towards parents.

In addition to guilt, the divorcee experiences grief. After having lived in an intimate relation for some time, the partner is now permanently gone. The experience is similar to that of losing a loved one at death, but the divorcee has much stronger guilt for having had a part in the departure of the partner. Even though conflict has been prevalent in their relationship, the divorcee loses a person who is emotionally significant to him or her. In death, the surviving partner recognizes that the departure of the loved one is an irreversible experience, but the divorcee has lost a significant person who is still in existence and may even live in the same community.

The emotional turmoil experienced by divorcees usually includes hostility. Frustration causes fluctuation of emotions from dependency on friends to anger, hatred, and hostility. Often friends who attempt to be helpful elicit bursts of anger in response to their kindness.

The newly-divorced person has difficulty establishing his identity. He is neither a single nor a married person. His inner conflict with his identity may cause outer conflicts. While demonstrating dependency on any person who extends friendship, he may conclude that the person is attempting to run his life.

The divorcee experiences loneliness and the loss of self-esteem. The couple probably began life together with plans for building a nice home, having and educating their children, and experiencing social acceptance. Divorce completely alters their plans. The procedure of divorce usually creates difficulty with relatives on both sides, especially if children are involved. Grandparents do not understand the visiting restrictions placed on them.

Effects on children

Children of divorcees are usually caught in the middle: they may love both parents but must be separated from one. Usually a legal contest takes place in determining who gains custody of the children. The loss of a parent leaves the child filled with anxiety and creates a vacancy in his life because each needs a father figure as well as a mother. Custody of the children is usually given to the mother because of her closer relationship with them; therefore, the children

Another emotional reaction to divorce is g_____.

(grief)

Another emotion expressed by divorcees is h_____.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Divorcees also experience l_____ and loss of s_____.

(loneliness, self-esteem)

Divorce leaves children with a _____ and a v_____ in their lives.

(anxiety, vacancy)

¹James H. Burns, "What It Means to Be Divorced," Pastoral Psychology, September 1958, p. 46.

must face life with the absence of the father. In death, children are able to adjust to the absence of a parent and may compensate by forming a closer unity with the surviving parent. In divorce, children feel abandoned and experience feelings of hostility.

Some counsellors have argued that children's exposure to constant conflict between parents is worse for their emotional health than divorce. Neither situation provides the right kind of environment for developing emotional and spiritual health.

Conclusion

Although marriage counsellors do not agree fully whether divorce is helpful or hurtful, a larger number today accept divorce as a solution than in the past. In 1948, Edmund Bergler wrote a book entitled Divorce Won't Help. Dwight H. Small wrote a book in 1977 entitled The Right to Remarry, which is advertised by the statement "I believe in divorce and remarriage—sometimes." On the back cover, the book promises to offer "fresh insights into the Christian viewpoint on divorce and remarriage, insights developed in light of today's changing needs."

Bergler believes that divorce will not help because neurosis is the primary cause. The neurotic person projects his own inner conflicts on the spouse and decides that separation from the partner will end the unhappy experience. Since the source of his conflicts is within, he does not escape them through divorce. The only solution is healing the neurosis through the help of a counsellor rather than dissolving the marriage.

Conflicts cannot be resolved if both parties are not willing to cooperate in solving them. Conflicts arise because of attitudes, and attitudes grow out of role-images and personal interests. A degree of conflict is normal for most couples; however, they make sufficient adjustments to enable happiness, based on common goals and interests, to prevail over unhappiness, growing out of conflicts. If couples would seek qualified counselling during the initial stages of serious conflict, most marriages could be saved. Greater efforts are being made now by courts in some areas to provide opportunities for marriage counselling before the divorce proceedings are continued.

The most effective solutions for the divorce problem are sufficient preparation for marriage, realism in facing the need for making adjustments in marriage, and positive commitment to God's will in assuming the marriage relationship. Most problems can be solved and marriage can become mutually satisfying if the partners are committed to working difficulties out. The increase in divorces today results largely from the attitude of many couples that they will try marriage and they will get a divorce if it doesn't work. The trite statement that "couples who pray together stay together" contains truth because couples who pray commit themselves to and base their marriages on the will

*Divorce usually leaves children without a
f _____. They feel a
and hostile.*

(Compare your answers with the text.)

*Bergler says that divorce will not help be-
cause a neurotic person's source of conflict
is within and _____ will not solve
that problem.*

(divorce)

List three solutions to divorce.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

of God. Under God's leadership, they are determined to face and solve conflicts.



Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). Do the following.

1. Describe the nature of divorce, and give three contributing factors. _____

2. What dilemma do pastors face when counselling persons contemplating divorce? _____

3. Name three Old Testament examples in which the ideal for marriage in Genesis 2:24 was violated. _____

4. Give the intention and implication of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. _____

5. According to Malachi, why did Yahweh no longer accept ceremonial worship? _____

6. Why did Hillel interpret indecency in Deuteronomy 24:1 to mean anything that the wife does with which the husband is not pleased? _____

7. How did Jesus answer the Pharisees' question concerning the lawfulness of a man's putting away his wife for every cause? _____

8. What does the "except clause" in Matthew 19 recognize about the nature of marriage? _____

9. What did Paul teach concerning divorce and remarriage? _____

10. Is God's requirement for marriage binding on non-Christians? Explain. _____

11. List five arguments some Protestant ministers give for marrying divorceés. _____

12. List five reasons some Protestant ministers give for not marrying divorceés. _____
13. Give two guiding principles regarding whether or not to marry divorceés. _____
14. Give two teachings in Romans which emphasize that a church must continue to demand righteousness. _____
15. According to Mark 10:11, why did Jesus say that when a husband gives his wife a bill of divorcement and marries another he commits adultery against her? _____
16. Is it inconsistent for a minister to refuse to marry divorceés while his church receives them into the church fellowship? Explain. _____
17. List three concepts of marriage. _____
18. Explain the concept of marriage as a commitment to God's will. _____
19. Name four emotional problems experienced by divorceés. _____
20. How does divorce affect children? _____
21. Why did Bergler believe that divorce does not help? _____
22. List three measures that will help prevent divorce. _____

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3).

Read pages 235-240, 241-246, and 314-319 in The Marriage Affair, edited by J. Allan Petersen, and answer the following questions.

1. After reading "Changing Homes, Changing Nation," which reflects the situation in the U.S., make a list of changes in your nation which threaten the stability of the home and contribute to the increasing divorce rate.

2. How does Letha Scanzoni define the new morality, and how does it affect the family?
3. What is the humanistic emphasis and the theological weakness of the new morality?
4. Outline Norman Vincent Peale's thirty-minute schedule for a couple contemplating divorce.

Advanced activity (Level 3).

Read pages 275-280, 286-292, and 293-298, in The Marriage Affair, and do the following assignment.

1. After reading the article by Martha Nelson entitled "Wives on the Time Clock," structure your approach in a counselling session in which a mother of small children has come to you for guidance concerning whether or not she should become employed.
2. What are the seven rules Charles W. Shedd suggests for controlling conversations during conflict between couples?
3. If a man confessed the sin of adultery to you during a counselling session, would you advise him to confess it to his wife? Why?

Seminar Discussion

1. If divorce is the result of failure, what are the causes of the breakdown in marriage? What can the Church do to stem the tide of divorce?
2. How does the Old Testament differ from the New Testament regarding the standards of marriage?
3. Does Jesus allow a divorcee to remarry?
4. What is Paul's teachings on divorce and remarriage?
5. What stand does the Church take today on the question of divorce and remarriage?
6. What actually constitutes marriage, and when is a marriage no longer valid?
7. Is divorce ever a solution for a couple who has marital problems?