

Marriage, Divorce and Jesus

1 Cor. 7

INTRODUCTION: While much pomp awaits for the official state funeral of the British Queen Elizabeth II, and while the formal coronation of King Charles III may be as far as a year away, make no mistake, that man Charles III is now the King of the UK and 14 other Commonwealth realms. A simple breath marked the transition of power from one royal monarch to the next.

That is how a man becomes a King in the UK. It is very simple, the death of one monarch leads to the enthronement of another.

We know when a man becomes King. A much more complicated question is, when does a boy become a man?

Men have wrestled with that question for millennia.

Is it when he can drive at 16? Join the military at 17? Vote at 18? Buy a drink at 21?

Some have suggested that it really happens when you lose your father. Others, when you have your first child.

For me, it seemed to happen when I stood before God and man and entered into a legal and spiritual covenant with my wife. Something changed that day and I knew it.

We live in a day where people make a massive investment in the **wedding ceremony**, but neglect to invest heavily in the actual **marriage relationship**.

It is considered something that one can't step into or out of with little grief or concern.

Yet, in scripture it carried massive significance.

1. Marriage points to the Essence of Who God is - Genesis 1:26–27 (ESV)

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Remember God is Trinity, that is there are 3 distinct persons in ONE GODHEAD.

Marriage relationship was the first unit of organized human institution that God ordained. Prior to organized **Government** or **Religion** - God ordained the **family**.

As a matter of fact, no Government or Nation will long endure if the family units it serves begin to crumble.

Not only does marriage point to the essence of the Godhead...

2. Marriage points to the Relationship between Christ and the Church - Ephesians 5:31–32 (ESV)

³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

- As such the marriage relationship holds a unique preeminence, a unique sanctity.
- Of the union that exist between a husband and a wife God says, “**This is what I have put together**”.

Now the question arises - is it ever appropriate for a man or a woman to seek through legal action to tear asunder that which God has joined together, the union that Paul tells us is the purest representation of the Gospel on planet earth?

It’s a sobering question. It’s a dangerous decision. And frankly it’s a question that you MUST be equipped to answer.

YOU ARE THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE FOR MARRIAGE.

They typically don’t come to me until their mind is made up.

You see - typically when a person is in a very difficult marriage they will go first to those in their immediate circle of influence. ***Honestly - that’s how it should be.*** Because those in their circle of influence will have the best vantage point and first hand knowledge of the relationship and they are best positioned to give truthful, loving and educated advice.

So hear me carefully - Divorce is a big deal.

For too long the church has been cowardly silent in its response to the **EPIDEMIC** of divorce that has been rampant in our congregations. Our failure to address the subject of divorce has caused us to lose great moral authority with regards to the sanctity of marriage when we do speak against things like homosexual unions.

The fact is, as sinful as homosexual marriage is, if we had properly address sinful divorce we probably wouldn’t even been dealing with the issue of homosexual marriage.

But, the two issues are distinctly different: Homosexual marriage is ALWAYS sinful, Divorce isn’t.

Here is what you need to understand: there is what I call a **ALLOWABLE DIVORCE** and there is an **UNBIBLICAL SINFUL DIVORCE**. You need to know the difference.

CONTEXT: *That is what Paul taught in 1 Cor. 7* -

- ***Corinth was the center of worship for the cult of Aphrodite*** - the female goddess of love. That brings with it certain challenges to be sure.
- It was also the Greek epicenter of a massive first century **women's liberation** movement. We will see Paul address that later in this series. The women threw off their head coverings indicating that they were under the authority of no man. That was all about women's lib and feminism.
- As a result - the Gospel's effect was different in Corinth. It is typically the case that God saves entire households at a time, as was the case for the **Philippian jailer** - he and his household were baptized. However in Corinth it was different, at least for some.

An unusual number of men were saved apart from their wives, and wives were saved apart from their husbands. You can imagine the trouble this caused? A new Christian was suddenly radically different from their pagan spouse. Not only that, they were gathering regularly with a group of people, some of the opposite gender, that they had far more in common with than they did their own husband or wife.

- Some began to divorce, which brought great distress into the church and the city. Divorce always disrupts community.
- Those who had divorced were hearing some saying they had done what is right, others were condemning their decisions and calling them to repent. What were they to do now? Return to their pagan EX? Remain single?

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 7:1–9 (ESV)

¹ Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."

In other words, celibacy is a legitimate option. It is a life to which some are called. Not a curse, but a calling.

² But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.

Uniquely in the city of Corinth, it is highly unlikely that many would be called to a life of celibacy. The temptations were too great.

³ The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time,

that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

If the husband and wife are physically able to be intimate, it should be a very normative thing in the Christian marriage. If it is not, something is very wrong. It could be a health issue, it could be a conflict... nevertheless, fix it.

⁶ Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. ⁷ I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

Paul was single. Some suggest that Paul himself may have been divorced. Remember he was a Pharisee when he came to Christ. Pharisees married. It was highly abnormal to have an adult single Pharisee. So, Paul says, "Singleness is good, I wish all of you could be single".

He used that language a lot... I wish all of you spoke in tongues, I wish all of you prophesied.

⁸ To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am.

Ok, when Paul says unmarried, he is referring to the divorced. Those who were married and now are unmarried.

⁹ But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

¹⁰ To the married I give this charge (**not I, but the Lord**)

When you see that in the text, it means, we already have a command from Jesus on this matter.

: the wife should not separate from her husband ¹¹ (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. ¹² To the rest I say (**I, not the Lord**)

That is, we don't have any record of Jesus addressing this category, so this is new revelation.

12b. that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.

OK, so let's zoom out and address a few issues: First, Deut. 24 the first authoritative revelation concerning divorce.

1. **Deuteronomy 24** - Moses taught that if a man takes a wife and finds some **INDECENCY** in her. He may write her a certificate of divorce and send her away.

Now this is very important because you see even in the Law of Moses we see that **God recognizes divorce**. I point that out because some people will say, “*well I know they are divorce legally but in God’s eyes they are still married*”. *I’m sorry friend but you are wrong*. Even from the earliest days God recognizes divorce.

It was an important legal right for a few reasons.

- **To protect the woman** – often a divorced woman would be at best a second class citizen in Israel and unwanted by any well respecting Jew. The certificate provided the reason for her divorce and made her legally eligible for remarriage.
- **To protect the nation against marital scams** – It was not uncommon for a wicked couple to divorce, send the wife to seduce and marry a wealthy man, divorce him and remarry the first husband, bringing into their union the wealth from the unsuspecting man.

The legal nature of divorce made that less likely.

So God never commands divorce, but when one occurs he recognizes it as a genuine disillusion of the marriage.

Now for millennia the jews had debated what was meant by Moses when he said the grounds for divorce was that some “**indecency**” was found in the spouse.

The interpretation were divided chiefly among the schools of two prominent rabbi’s.

- o **The Shammai school** - Who believed indecency referred to some form of sexual immorality.
- o **The Hillel school** - Who believed indecency was much broader and could refer to a really bad meal, or rooting for KY in football.

2. **In the Ministry of Jesus** -

When Jesus began to teach one of the questions posed to him by the teachers of the law was - what are the legitimate grounds for a divorce? In the sermon on the Mount Jesus acknowledges what Moses had taught, and gives it greater clarity...

Matthew 5:31–32 (ESV)

³¹ “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³² 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.

So Jesus says the legitimate grounds for divorce is Sexual Immorality. What exactly does that mean? Well it's a broad term.

Sexual Immorality is the word ***Porneia*** in the Greek. *Porneia* includes adultery but it is not limited to adultery. Porneia, from which we get our word Pornography can include any form of sexual sin. This can include adultery, incest, bestiality, homosexuality, consorting with a prostitute, pedophilia, and perhaps even serial pornography. It is a broad term. It is as if Jesus choose to use a word that would give room for the new sexual perversions men would create in the years to come.

He could have used the word, "Moichos" as he did in Matthew 15:19, which meant adultery and only adultery. But he didn't.

In other words, if you have a pattern of unbroken sexual unfaithfulness, even short of adultery, Jesus said there is potential grounds for divorce.

Now, be careful with that. Every man struggles sexually, especially in our culture. If you find that your husband looked at something he shouldn't have and you run to the lawyer. Your heart is probably not where it should be.

It is wise to seek counsel with godly counselors, but it's not by any means a command to divorce.

NOW WHY? Why did God allow a person to legally dissolve something that God Himself put together?

Matthew 19:7–8 (ESV)

⁷ They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" ⁸ 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.**

Jesus is saying that divorce is never intended or commanded, but it is allowed because of the presence of sin in the world. ***It was an allowance.***

Legitimate Biblical Grounds for Divorce:

1. Sexual Immorality

NOW that was the revelation up to that point. But then Paul adds one more category where again, divorce is not commanded, but it is allowed by God.

Paul -

1 Corinthians 7:13–16 (ESV)

13 If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. 14 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. 15 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. 16 For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Legitimate Biblical Grounds for Divorce:

1. Sexual Immorality

2. Abandonment

This second example of a biblical divorce regards the issue of ABANDONMENT. There are times when a Christian is married to someone who is not a Christian, a person who lives life by a very different set of values and rules. At times the non christian demands a divorce. When this happens, after you have done everything you can to reason with them and save your marriage. Ultimately, if you decide that you can no longer fight it, Paul says sometimes it's for the best that you, "Let them go".

In the State of Florida, since the advent of the, "No Fault Divorce" If a person wants a divorce there is nothing you can do to stop them. You can delay it, but you cannot stop it. So I typically advice people to pray through it, seek counsel from friends to determine what is wise. So take the position that it is best to fight it as long as possible in order to give more hope for God to change a person's heart. Others would say that at times it may be best to bring peace for the sake of the children and begin moving on with life.

So there we have two occasions when scripture allows for divorce. Those are the ONLY two occasions. **Sexual Immorality and Abandonment.**

NOW - there are a dozen other tricky circumstances that need to be addressed.

- What about physical abuse?
- What about someone who is married to a drug addict who has gambled everything away and become an addict?
- What about someone who is married to a person that refuses marital intimacy over years?

In those cases I would encourage you to refer them to the leadership body of the church, Pastors and Ministry Team. They would need to use discernment to see if perhaps there are some cases that are so sinfully wrong that they are TANTAMOUNT, COEQUAL to, THE SAME AS abandonment or sexual immorality.

CONCLUSION: Let me address 3 groups of people:

1. **To the MARRIED:** Guard your marriage, value you marriage as God does. Work hard on your marriage. Date each other, continue to win each other's heart. Champion the marriages of your friends.
2. **To the BIBLICALLY DIVORCED** - Listen to me. You are not a second class Christian. If you have been sinned against, no one should treat you as a sinner.
3. **To the UN-BIBLICALLY DIVORCED** - Run to the cross, recognize it is not a light thing to tear apart what God joined together. It is no small mistake to pursue an adulterous 2nd marriage. BUT ALSO REALIZE, Unbiblical Divorce is NOT the unpardonable sin. Start where you are walking close and clean with the Lord.

CLOSING ILLUSTRATION/INVITATION: Listen, do you want to have generations of faithful marriages?

- a. Marry, have children.
- b. Join a faithful church and become a real part of it.
- c. Engage in your community, stand up for what you believe in.

Do those things and not only will you prosper, but we all will prosper. Fail to do them and you will suffer, and we all will ultimately suffer.