

Here is God's own view about divorce

Everybody knows that getting a divorce can be damaging to a person's happiness and wellbeing and yet the rate at which people are divorcing from each other continues to escalate upward every time a poll is taken.

The more obvious problems that can be hurtful to people who divorce are displaced children and loss of control over them, loneliness, increased living expenses, costs of property settlement, living with feelings of bitterness, and much more than that.

However, as bad as these problems can be, there are even worse ones than these. They are the secret ones, which nobody wants to talk about because they concern our dealings with a God who can get angry with us at times. And in our present culture God tends to be viewed simply as a loving Protector who is only kind and indulgent never strict or severe like a permissive parent who tries to correct His children but never really means what He says.

So the thinking goes like this "Sure, God had some things written in the Bible about the bad side of divorce, but He can't possibly be serious about all that, can He? I mean, guidelines are fine, but this spouse of mine is really impossible for me to live with. There must be a way out of this somewhere. Surely our pastor will say, in your case it's OK."

So divorces go on and we accept them as normal living. A hundred years ago in America divorce was considered to be a bad thing, and it was fairly rare, especially among Christians. There are probably young adults living today who are unaware of this fact. Each generation tends to think that the world has always been just like it is today.

What is God's view?

Here it is. God says He hates for married people to split up. He really said that, and it's written for us in the Book of Malachi, chapter 2:

Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously yet she is your companion and the wife of your covenant...let none deal treacherously against the wife of His youth. For the Lord, the God of Israel says He hates putting away...

So He hates divorce. Here the Lord refers to our married partners as the wives (or husbands) of our covenant. What does this mean? Well, we all know what it means. When we are married in a Christian ceremony we speak vows about how we will be faithful to each other until death separates us. What few people realize today is that this spoken covenant is made to more than just to each other it is also spoken to God Himself. And that's a serious matter.

People often think very lightly about breaking a vow to a spouse that is made in a church, standing before a man of God. But if this were not extremely serious (which it is), one should also realize that he is breaking a vow made to God as well.

Can we break our vows that we make to God without suffering consequences? In a word, no. There are untold numbers of people in our time who are suffering under the judgment of God for this very thing and the additional tragedy about it is that there are few men of God who are willing to tell them the truth or biblical facts about the matter. Does God actually punish people for breaking His laws? There is a popular teaching in many churches today that He does not. That belief fits in squarely with our secular world view that we have invented for ourselves. But the Christian Bible is still true; however the mind of man changes about it. And we will see what that Word says to us, even in these times.

What about adultery?

There are two reasons which God gives us in His Word for getting a legitimate divorce. Some Christians believe there is only one, but we will notice them both. Here is a statement that was made by the Lord Jesus Christ about it:

Matthew 19:9 - Whoever shall put away his wife, except it should be for the case of fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery. And whoever marries her that is put away commits adultery.

Now, this scripture is clear enough. It gives an allowance for divorce in case a married partner commits adultery (which is sleeping together in today's terms) with someone besides the married partner. This does not mean that the divorce must absolutely take place it is always better to truly repent, forgive, and go on but it means that one has permission from God to get a divorce if he or she chooses under this circumstance.

But there is more to this than that. Read the verse above again. If a divorce takes place without the ground of adultery, then remarriage for either of the two people would constitute the commission of adultery. This would include both divorce transacted against the protest of one of the partners, as well as divorce by mutual consent. Either way, divorce and remarriage to another person is forbidden, says our Lord, unless there has been adultery.

Now, does this situation last until death? For the one who initiates or agrees to the divorce for no biblical reason yes until death. Either that or they may re marry each other. But for the one who may have been wrongfully put away, and against his consent, he or she must stay single to avoid adultery. However, if the one who did the putting away should either remarry or sleep with another person, then the one who has been put away seems to have the right to remarry without committing adultery.

Some people have the idea that there is a difference between marriages on earth and marriages "made in heaven" -- which supposedly might allow for a divorce if one were not "married in heaven." But the Bible allows no such distinction. If your names are on a marriage document down at the courthouse, then you are married. God honors this. There is even more to this, but we will leave it at that that point.

This other case in First Corinthians, chapter 7. Here it shows that a Christian believer who is married to an unbelieving mate must stay married to that person as long as he or she is willing. And often they can have a good marriage. Paul wrote,

And the woman who has a husband who is not a believer, if he is pleased to live with her, let her not leave him.

Paul's word, inspired by God, was that religious scruples are not a reason for getting a divorce. To do so would constitute adultery. But then, Paul does seem to give an out of the situation if the unbelieving spouse chooses to depart. Here it is:

But if the unbelieving one should depart, let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.

The question here is what Paul meant by "not under bondage." Did he mean that one is not required to contest the separation, or did he mean that one is not under the edict of becoming an adulterer if he or she remarries after the unbeliever has left? Christians today take varying views on this point. My view is the latter one, that the Christian may remarry after that particular kind of separation and divorce has taken place.

The dangerous part

Now here comes the real danger that exists in wrongly divorcing. There are two big voids in the common understanding of divorce and remarriage that exist in our culture today. The first is that people in general do not know that divorce is a sin before God unless there is an allowable reason for it according to God's Word. They don't know this because they are not being told. Many churches of our time do not make an issue of what is sin and what is not. And the more than one-half of our population that is not church-ed does not even have the word sin in their vocabulary.

We could ask this: If more people understood these facts, would it make any difference in the number of divorces that take place? No, not likely. Do people understand that the speed limit on our freeways in America is generally seventy miles an hour? Yes, those limits are clearly posted, but does that keep drivers from driving eighty? No. If a police car is not in sight, it's clear sailing. Just knowing that there is a law does not prevent people from breaking it if they have a desire to do it. That is, unless they understand that there is a penalty for it. That is why drivers tend to slow down when they see a police car. There is a penalty for speeding, and it is often enforced.

The penalty is the thing. Does God have penalties? Not so that we would notice. And this is the other big void in our culture. People in general today are not aware that God directly punishes sin in the lives of people and nations. The Bible is full of evidence that God judges as well as blesses, but the Bible is being read very little by most Christians.

But God is yet alive, and He has never changed. And He did not suddenly reform Himself and become a totally nice God when the age of the Old Testament was past. So we have a clear record in God's law book about what He does to people who commit sin (and that's all of us). Yes, there is mercy for us, or else none of us would even be here still alive on this planet. But there is also wrath and judgment after His longsuffering (patience) has worn out.

Adultery and fornication are abounding in our Western World today - not to the extent of the ancient city of Sodom, but we are on our way in that direction. Unmarried people who are living together is a major part of the picture, and people wrongly divorcing and remarrying is a large part of it as well. Well, what is God doing about it? The answer is that there is much grief, sorrow and even agony and death that is taking place in the lives of sinners that is caused directly by the hand of God – but people are unaware of the source of it all. We have forgotten the fear of God, even though all through the Bible we are earnestly warned never to forget that.

Regrettably, many Christians are being taught today that the word “fear” means only to respect and honor. But it means more than that if one looks up the original word. It also means to truly fear even to the point of terror. (See the Greek.) This situation is not hard to understand, and is the same as with our own children. If they are under our discipline they love us greatly, while at the same time they fear to disobey us because they know there will be unpleasant consequences.

Are there unpleasant consequences from God? Yes. There is no reason to fear God if He does not judge and punish people, but there is much reason to fear Him if He does. What does the Bible record tell us? Here are some examples of what God wants us to know.

Hebrews 13:4 - Marriage is honorable in all, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge”

This is in New Testament, of course, which shows that God still judges sin.

I Corinthians 10:8,11 - Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day twenty three thousand...Now all these things happened to them for examples (to us)...

This statement is in reference to an occasion that is recorded in Numbers 25 when God sent a great plague upon the Israelites because of their wholesale commission of adultery. So today, in like manner, we have a great plague of HIV/AIDS that God has sent upon the earth with the result that millions of people have died and are dying. But the church today is not witnessing to the fact that it is God who sends plagues. They don't just happen for no cause.

And God judges and punishes more than just sexual sin. All of us suffer from God's judgments from time to time. But we don't have to live this way. God is also the God of providence, peace and joy, and He blesses the obedience of people with good blessings just as He does the opposite from time to time by sending suffering because of our sins.

Now what about those who have divorced in the past without having biblical reason? Is there forgiveness for them? Yes, if there is repentance and new direction in life. In I Corinthians 6 Paul presented a list of very bad sins, which included adultery. Then he wrote,

And such were some of you, but you are washed, you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

- Loren Wilson (This article may be copied freely.)