

JULY, 2007, NEWSLETTER

FIGHT FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

On November 16th Doris will have been dead for 5 years! Had she lived, we would now have been married for 58 years. She had the nature of a bunny rabbit: gentle, sweet, kind, harmless. We really loved each other, and I miss her a lot. I owe those wonderful memories to Jesus. He made our marriage a blessing in place of the disaster that I had made it.

I remember times when we didn't speak to one another for 3, 4, 5 days. Ice was forming on the walls. I remember anger, bitter words, near violence. Not all the time, of course, but far too many times. I wish I could say that period lasted for only a year or two, but in fact it lasted for almost 20 years.....even when I was a "born-again" Christian, even when I was a pastor, for crying out loud! Quite possibly we would have divorced except for my being a pastor. And, oh, yes, we had kids! Four of them.

I pastored churches for 30 years, and have been involved in ministry for 50 years, and I have learned something: we were not the only ones to struggle in our marriage. EVERYBODY has to struggle to have a successful marriage. (There is a curse on relationships, remember?)

Whose idea was marriage, anyway? You Bible students know the answer, *God created man in His own image.....male and female He created them.* (Gen. 1:27) *Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.* (Gen. 2:24) Since marriage is difficult, God made provision for divorce in the law, in Deuteronomy 24: (paraphrased) "If a man marries a woman (Note: men are to marry women.) and for whatever reason he doesn't like her, he can just write her a certificate of divorce and push her out the back door and go on with his life."

Jesus had something to say on this matter, however, in Matthew 19:1-10. He said that Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of men's hearts, but this was never God's intention. He said that God intended marriage to be a lifetime covenant. God later revealed to the Apostle Paul that marriage symbolizes the relation of Christ and His church. And, of course, we remember the passage in the Old Testament when the prophet stated that GOD HATES DIVORCE! *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.* (Malachi 2:16)

God hates divorce! The church beats up on people with this teaching, implying that if you have been divorced then God hates you! Not! God hates divorce, but He does not hate people who divorce. God loves people. He loves people who divorce. God hates adultery, homosexuality, stealing, and lying, but he does not hate the people who do those things. It is so easy to go to an extreme on one side or the other of this issue. We can become legalistic, and part of the church has done that, especially in the past. Some preaching makes divorce tantamount to the unforgivable sin. God can forgive mass murderers, drug dealers, and Satanists, but if you have been divorced you can't be a minister or even take communion.

I must confess that I have struggled in this area as a pastor and counselor. Christ's teaching about marriage and divorce is clear, and He authorized divorce only for *porneo*,

which, by the way, has more implications than adultery, and He permitted divorce when an unbeliever chooses to leave a believer. How about a believing wife who has a husband who lies around the house drunk every day, refuses to make a living, and curses his wife and children? Or beats them? I counsel wives in these types of situations regularly. After exploring all options, I counsel these wives to leave their husbands, to get him out of the house if that is possible, since this drastic step is the only thing that might possibly get his attention and save his soul, not to mention saving the children and the wife. Leave until he gets help. I encourage them to pray, to forgive, and to seek God's will for the future. I believe this is godly counsel, and I am disappointed with the church at large for ignoring and abandoning so many abused wives and children. I believe their stance is irresponsible and cowardly. By the way, sometimes the abusive one is the wife and mother.

On the other extreme, many churches ignore the issue of divorce, even tolerating divorce and quick remarriage among the clergy. Remember, God hates divorce, because of what divorce does to people, to families, to children. In the midst of the hurt feelings, anger, and bitterness, husbands and wives think, "I can't take this anymore. We don't have a marriage, we have a civil war. Divorce would solve my problem." The truth is that divorce almost never solves the problem. The pain can go on and on. My friend, Paul Watson, from whom I borrowed the outline of this message, said that he talked with a guy who had gotten a divorce after 15 years of marriage, who said, "If I only knew how tough this would be, I would have fought harder for my marriage."

Did you notice that in the passage in Malachi God used the words, "violence" and "treacherous" to describe one who divorces? A high percentage of those living in poverty in this land are divorced and abandoned wives and their children. God regards that as violence. Divorce sends a message, "I can't put up with your faults! You are a failure, a lousy person, ugly, undesirable, not good enough for me!" One time a lady told me that after she had one of her breasts removed in a mastectomy, her husband said to her, "I'm not going to be married to half a woman!" and left her for a younger woman. That was violent! And treacherous! When I think of that man standing before a holy God at the judgment, it makes me shudder. For the church to be silent about such abominations is also cowardly and irresponsible.

Oh, yes, the children. They go from an unhappy family to:

- Two sets of parents instead of one
- How to explain Mom's new boyfriend and Dad's new girlfriend
- Who is the primary custodian, and who gets visitation rights?
- Who gets the kids on birthdays, Christmas, Easter, summers?
- And if we share special days, can we all get along at the same park?
- And when the kids get married, who sits where in the places of honor during the wedding ceremony? (I have officiated at weddings where it almost degenerated to physical violence.)
- Then there is the subject of alimony, deadbeat dads, vengeful wives
- I have many books and articles about the deleterious, long-term effect of divorce on children. Also, I have learned that divorce of parents is even painful when the "kids" are 30 or 40 years old or older. It is violence and treachery!

When husbands and wives divorce, 95 percent remarry. “Since the problem was with my spouse, and not me, I can certainly find the right person this time.” These are the statistics:

- 1st marriages.....50% fail/divorce
- 2nd marriages.....76% “ “
- 3rd marriages..... 86% “ “
- 4th marriages..... 93% “ “

Girls from divorced parents, 60% divorce.

The problem, my dear friends, I say in a gentle and kind manner, is not your spouse. It's you! It's your character, or lack thereof. It's the stuff in your heart. For instance, it's

- **Selfishness**
 1. Time – television, sports, fishing, shopping
 2. Money – it is not uncommon for guys to raise heck about their wives' extravagant spending for school clothes and groceries, while they have a new, extended-cab, 4-wheel drive pickup, and a big boat sitting in the driveway. And some husbands work 2 or 3 jobs while their wives whine about needing new furniture, new clothes, or a new house.
 3. Vacations – whose parents will we visit this year, as if I need to ask?
 4. Job – she feels abandoned. (Pastors are among the worst offenders)
- **Anger** - I can't adequately convey the problems anger causes in marriages and families. I just noticed in Galatians 5 (NKJV) where the “deeds of the flesh” are listed, that along with “adultery....idolatry... hatred...heresies....murders....drunkenness...” is listed “outbursts of wrath.” And the punch line is that those who practice such things “will not inherit the kingdom of God,” which translates “they will go to hell and not to heaven” in my understanding. I believe God regards this matter with some seriousness.
- **Control** - Control is the essence of witchcraft. Control is exercised either through domination (usually the male trait) or manipulation (usually the female trait). Thirty to forty percent of people in an average congregation acknowledge they were controlled in an ungodly way by their parents after they left home.
- **Pornography/ogling women** – for men
- **Flirting/soap operas/romantic novels/fantasy relationships** – for women
- **Unreasonable jealousy**
- **Clinging to parents** - We are commanded to leave our parents and cleave to our spouse.

These are a few of the character issues that destroy marriages. (I think I was guilty of all of them except clinging to parents, so you can see why my marriage had a few

problems. Poor Doris!) By God's grace, my marriage was healed, and, so I have great confidence that He can heal any marriage if there is humility and acknowledgement that I am partly responsible for our problems. By God's grace, our children did not have to suffer the heartbreak and other problems that go along with divorce of parents. Most of what kids take into life and into marriage is caught, not bought. I know wives and husbands who have suffered for years in terrible marriages for the sake of their children. (I am certainly not saying that staying in a bad marriage is always the right thing to do.) There is a life laid down in love and sacrifice for others, and I am sure their reward will be as great as someone on the mission field in Africa.

If you recognize some of the character issues in your own life, pursue inner healing! Repent, forgive, stop criticizing! Forgive your parents, repent of judgments, break generational and word curses. Start expressing love through your words and actions. Pray for one another. Older couples, help the young couples. Look around, reach out, help them to reach the level of maturity that you have reached.

Do you accept it? I know you do (as Joel Osteen would say).