
Words of Truth

Except For Fornication

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I have read that marriages have a fifty percent chance of lasting. The statistics I could find for the sake of this article were not clear enough for me to list. Regardless of the statistics, I know that I meet a lot of divorced individuals. It is a challenge often faced when trying to convert someone to Christ. The subject matter is not a new one either. It dates as far back as the Old Testament period of time. Under the Law of Moses, the children of Israel desired the right to end their marriages and were granted that right because of the hardness of their hearts (Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and Mark 10:1-12).

Most times when people decide to end their marriages it is because one or the other has done something wrong. Think about something for a minute. How often did the children of Israel blow it when it came to their relationship with our Heavenly Father (Psalms 106:1-48)? The Scriptures say things got so bad that there was no remedy (II Chronicles 36:14-16). Israel played the harlot against God to whom they were espoused to. Yet, God considered Himself married to them and wanted to restore His relationship with His whorish people (Ezekiel 16:1-63). He gave them the opportunity to repent (Jeremiah 3:1-4:4).

Think about this: *"Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers? Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god. The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the LORD of hosts. And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand. Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously"* (Malachi 2:10-16). God is NEVER pleased with marriages ending. He may permit it, for a single cause; but it is not His will that marriages end. So, what is that single cause that permits putting away?

Permission, For What Cause?

There are times when marriages end and the only thing a person can do is remain unmarried or be reconciled (I Corinthians 7:10-15). Any choice to marry another person in such a situation is sinful (Romans 7:1-3). Then there are times wherein a marriage ends because one party in that marriage had unlawful sexual intercourse. That is what is known as fornication. This is when people who know the Scriptures begin to discuss what a justifiable divorce is and is not.

For the sake of our study, let's consider a marriage between two Christians. Let's say one person has committed fornication and it is a known fact. What I mean by that is, this is not an "I think he or she..." kind of situation. It is not a car parked outside of a strip club situation. It is not a pornography on a computer situation. It is a situation wherein one person in the marriage has committed fornication and all efforts to restore that person have been made (i.e. Matthew 18:15-17, Galatians 6:1, and James 5:19-20). Yet, the fornicator is unwilling to repent. Spiritually, we see such an example in Thyatira (Revelation 2:20-24). Physically, in the case of marriages, God PERMITS the ending of a marriage at this point.

Jesus taught: *"It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, **saving for the cause of fornication**, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery"* (Matthew 5:31-32). The lone exception to not ending a marriage, is in the case of fornication. That's it! A person may choose, but does not have to, put away his or her spouse if that unrepentant spouse is a fornicator. Even with this lone exception though, people often confuse the order in which putting away is permitted.

The Cause Cannot Come After The Effect

For fornication to be grounds upon which one is permitted to end his or her marriage, fornication must be the reason for that marriage ending. If a spouse leaves, and then after departing from the other chooses to have sex with another person, the Lord permits nothing. The marriage has already been broken. The cause was something other than fornication. This mistake has long left people to play the "waiting game" and then they run to the concept of a "mental divorce". The cause cannot come after the effect. For fornication, to be the reason for ending the marriage, it must be the cause!

Conclusion

We have seen that God hates divorce. Remaining married is the rule. The exception is if fornication causes a marriage to end. Keep it that simple. Understand this too, if you are unmerciful to your spouse, what do you think the Lord will do (James 2:12-13)? Let's be careful to teach the rule and not to overemphasize the exception (i.e. Matthew 19:1-12)!