

## Divorce and Remarriage

A couple of readers have asked me to give my understanding of what the Bible says about divorce and remarriage. And since other readers have complained that I am not feeding the sheep (I'm still not all that convinced that this is my function on this site) I agreed to do it.

In order to cover the subject in as orderly a manner as possible, I want to lay out the general organization of this essay. The paper should proceed as follows:

1. Who we are in Christ
2. Our rights as Christians
3. What we are called to in Christ
4. Our relationships and Christ's standards
5. Marriage and Christ

At first you might ask: what does my identity in Christ have to do with marriage and divorce? If I execute this paper correctly, it will quickly become obvious. However, I don't think some of you are going to like the conclusions I come to.

Who are we in Christ? We are, first and foremost new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). We were sons of wrath (Eph 2:3), but now we are sons of God (John 1:12). But it gets more interesting. Most of the Word of Faith teachers preach that we have rights and powers and an inheritance of riches. But the Bible says we are slaves, bond slaves (Gal 1:10; Eph 6:6; Col 4:12) of Jesus Christ. What does it mean to be a bond servant or a bond slave?

The Enhanced Strong's Lexicon (you can buy a copy of this outstanding tool for your own use) defines a bondservant or bond slave as: "one who is devoted to another to the disregard of one's own interests." It is also used to describe, metaphorically, one who gives himself up to another's will, one whose service is used by Christ in extending and advancing His cause among men.

If we have an accurate view of our relationship to Christ, then we recognize that at no time is it my will, but always Christ's will in my life. Are you starting to see where I'm going with this?

As a Christian, I have no rights. My will should be totally submitted to the will of Jesus Christ. I must be willing to do what He wants me to do. Anything less and Jesus is not really and totally my Lord.

Why is this significant? Because of what God calls us to. In 1 Peter 4:12, 13 Peter points out that we should not be surprised at the fiery ordeals which come upon us for our testing. And believe me, I do understand that sometimes a marriage can seem like a really fiery ordeal. Though he was speaking about slaves, notice what Peter said in 1 Peter 2:20-23, I think it's applicable in marriage as well.

<blockquote>1 Peter 2:20-23

- 20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.
- 21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,
- 22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;
- 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; </blockquote>

In other words, if we suffer for doing what is right we should consider ourselves to simply be following in Christ's step.

But it's not enough for us to know that we are called to suffer (1 Peter 2:21). We are also told that we are not called to sit around and sulk in bitter resentment (James 1:2), as satisfying as it may seem. The first part, suffering, happens to us whether we want it to or not. The second, sulking in bitter resentment, often develops in us whether realize it or not.

However, if we approach our trial in a way God desires us to, the suffering works those qualities in us that are pleasing to God (2 Peter 1:5-7).

What, according to Peter, should be our response to insult, hurt, and offense? Apparently we are to endure it patiently (1 Peter 2:20). We are to trust Him who judges righteously (v 23). If we trust God, we obey Him in full confidence that His will is being worked in my life when I am obedient to Him, no matter the cost of that obedience (Luke 14:26 – 33)

But all of the above is tied up in forgiveness. And Jesus lays down some very specific instructions with respect to forgiveness. In fact, His instructions provide very little in the way of wiggle room. He tells us that we are to forgive those who offend us.

Starting all the way back in Proverbs (19:11) God says my glory is in my willingness to overlook a transgression. Matthew 5:7 says that the merciful are blessed. Luke 6:27-34 runs down an entire list of our responses to those who may not like us or who we may not like. Notice what it says:

- a. Do good to others
- b. Bless those who curse you
- c. Turn the other cheek
- d. Give them more than they demand

- e. Treasure, or care for dearly, those who don't treat you right
- f. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you.

But notice, that none of these requirements are conditional. That is, none of them say "do so and so as long as the other person does such and such." The command refers only to me and my actions, not the actions of the other person. Jesus, of course, personified this when He asked the Father to forgive His killers while they were in the process of killing Him (Luke 23:34).

Matthew 18:21ff says we are to forgive those who offend us. And those who offend us repeatedly are to be forgiven repeatedly. I don't know, but repeated offense seems to be a rather common part of being married.

For a moment, let's look at Jesus statements involving marriage. When talking to the Israelites, He tells them, in Matthew 19, that a man and a woman become one when they wed and that no man should separate them. He also pointed out that Moses permitted divorce only because of the hardness of their (the Israelites) hearts.

Divorce generally happens for one or more of three basic reasons. Those reasons are:

1. He (or she) cheated on me
2. We don't get along
3. The other person is not giving me what I need

Almost all of the reasons given in counseling sessions, expressed during heated arguments, or stated indignantly to our friends are variations on one or more of these themes.

But if my spouse cheats on me, I mean if he sleeps with another woman (or, surprise!!! - another man) how am I instructed to respond? I am to forgive them.

If my spouse harangues me and constantly tears me down, how am I to respond? Do I rip into her or do I respond with kind words, prayer, and gentleness? Well, according to the Bible, I respond with kind words prayer, and gentleness.

If the other person is not giving me what I need, then should I look elsewhere and simply cut my spouse out of my life? Well, again according to the Bible, that is not an option. My wife and I are one and no one is to separate us, not even me.

Given whose I am and the standards my Lord has established for my relationships, it would seem that I do not have divorce as an option if I am to be a disciple of Christ.

Is what I am saying difficult? It can be. In fact, if I, in my own strength, try to respond as Christ would have me respond, I would soon need false teeth to replace the ones I destroyed by gritting my teeth to survive the relationship.

But notice what God says about me living and thriving in a relationship that is less than satisfactory.

First, He says I can do it when he points out that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil 4:13). And no, He's not talking about being able to raise the dead, do healings, or prophesy. He is talking instead, about the much more difficult issues of living a godly day to day life.

But it doesn't stop there. Or as the late night television commercials say "But wait! There's more!" Not only does God provide us with the strength to live as he would have us live, He even goes the extra step of working in us a desire to go the extra step. (Philippians 2:13).

And what do you suppose happens if I stay in a very uncomfortable marriage, depending on Christ as my source? Well, let's go back and look at 2 Peter 1:5-7.

- As we are diligent in our walk, we develop moral excellence.
- As we develop moral excellence, we grow in our understanding of God and ourselves.
- As we grow in wisdom and knowledge.
- As we grow in wisdom and knowledge, we develop self-control.
- As we develop self-control, we increase in perseverance.
- As we increase in perseverance, we grow in godliness.
- This moves us toward brotherly kindness.
- And brotherly kindness develops love.

If I am obedient to Christ and allow Him to work in me, by staying in the marriage, I can only develop as a Christian. If the two of us are being obedient to Christ, then as we mature in Christ, the marriage will be healed of the damage and hurt and we will grow together as we are conformed to the image of Christ.

On the other hand, if at the first, second, third, or tenth sign of trouble, I decide to bail and start over with someone else, what has God accomplished in my life?

The bottom line: If I want to grow as a Christian, divorce is not an option. If, on the other hand, I am not interested in actually growing in Christ, then I can do whatever I want. And then, divorcing my wife this week and marrying a tasty young thing a week later (read here Clarence McClendon) is just showing that God blessed me to recover from a bad marriage. Take a look at an article from Charisma Online just so you don't think I'm exaggerating.

Divorce short-circuits God's work in our lives and insures that we will never depend on Christ's work in our lives and thus never mature as a Christian.

Divorce appears to be a lose-lose-lose proposition.

But what if my husband decides to leave me? Am I under any obligation to remain single? Perhaps we can discuss that next time?