

LESSON 20: DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

PRINCIPLES BEHIND DIVORCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

_When examining Scripture, it appears that there is a shift in beliefs about marriage from the Old Testament to the New Testament. In reality, it is not a shift in God's understanding of marriage but rather a shift in the way He handles it with us.

Read Deuteronomy 21:10-14

- ▶ What truth about relationships between man and woman are found in this passage?

At first glance, this passage appears cruel to the wife, but you have to remember the context behind it. In those days, battles were usually village against village. When one village would win, they would kill all the men in the other village. This would leave the women without income and no government to provide assistance.

God provides for these women by allowing the men to take them as wives. He also protects them by telling the men that they cannot just trash her, but have to allow her one month to mourn the loss of her family. During this time of mourning she is taken in and provided for.

Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4

- ▶ What does this passage say about divorce?

When this passage says, "he has found some indecency in her" it was not necessarily that she betrayed her husband, but that he simply did not like something about her. That was the law of the time.

Read Mark 10:4-8

- ▶ How has the way God handles marriage/divorce change from the Old Testament to the New?

This passage is when the Pharisees have come to Jesus and asked Him if it lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Jesus responds by asking them what Moses commended in the Old Testament or the Law.

God allowed divorce in the Old Testament because of the hardening of man's heart. In the New Testament, God now disallows divorce based on simply not liking something about the woman. In both instances though, God provides some protection for the woman. So if you take a wife, you cannot trash her, and if you do send her away, you have to give her a piece of paper that says that she has not really done anything bad, but that you simply did not like her.

Read Ezra 10:1-3

- ▶ What is the basis of divorce in this passage?

They were married to unbelievers and foreign women which was against the Law. The purpose behind this widespread divorce is that they wanted to bring the land back to holiness so they would be in God's favor again.

Read Malachi 2:14-17

- ▶ What does this passage say about divorce?

The Old Testament ends with a very strong statement from God about marriage. "For I hate divorce says the Lord, the God of Israel." When God describes His relationship with us in the Old and New Testament, He often uses the picture of a marriage. Here He equates divorce with violence. Clearly, God values the home and does not like divorce.

In the other passages, you see that initially the woman is protected. Later you see God make provisions to protect the morals of the home. Now you see where the home itself is protected. This progressive change is because there was a progressive understanding in the hearts of men about God's view of marriage and divorce. Family is sacred and there should be no dissolution of the home.

PRINCIPLES BEHIND DIVORCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Read Matthew 5:31-32

- ▶ What does this passage say about divorce and remarriage?

Jesus clearly says that if the man divorces his wife, and she did not break the marriage vow, and she goes on to remarry that the man forced her into adultery. In the New Testament times, if a woman was divorced, she often did not have any family to go back to and no source of income. She was then forced into either prostitution or remarriage in order to survive.

Adultery in this context would be her being out of God's original intent. Once you marry, you are in the original intent of God for your life. If forced to remarry, then you are now out of that original intent. This passage clearly places the blame on the husband for her being out of God's will. The woman at this time had little choice in order to be able to survive.

The exception to this and the grounds for divorce found in this passage are in the case of unchastity or unholiness.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:10-17

▶ What does this passage say about remarriage?

If the believing wife leaves her husband with no basis for leaving, she has two options: she can stay unmarried or go back to her husband. She is not to remarry.

In Ezra we see if you are married to an unbeliever you have the right to divorce him/her. In the New Testament, you see a shift where this is not a valid reason for divorce.

If you are married to an unbeliever and they leave because of your holiness, then you can remarry. That is why it says that you are no longer enslaved or bound to the marriage. This was commonly seen in Corinth. In the Roman bath everybody got in unclothed. When Christianity came to the area, a lot of Christian women did not want to un-robe in front of other men. These women's husbands got mad because they found joy in showing off their wives to the other men. This tension led to a large number of divorces.

▶ From what we have discussed, what are the two rules concerning divorce?

1. I can divorce my spouse if there is an affair
2. I can let my spouse leave, but I cannot leave my spouse.

REAL WORLD EXAMPLES

▶ What happens when real world situations come up that do not fit into those two rules?

Examples:

1. *A Lady came into my office one day. She said that every night before they went to bed her husband would take out his 357 magnum revolver and put one shell in and spin the cylinder and cock it and put it up against her head. Then he would pull it back and decock it, put it in the drawer and then they would go to sleep. Her question to me was "can I leave him?"*
2. *A lady came into my office and said that whenever her husband wants sex and she refuses, he throws her on the bed and rapes her. His argument was that she is his wife, and her body is not her own so, it is not rape. She is to yield to him. He pulls scripture up and points out where her body is not her own. She was consistently and constantly raped weekly when he wanted it, and she did not.*
3. *Another lady came into my office and said that her husband beat her 2 to 3 times a week. He was smart and would not hit her on the face but on the body where it could not be seen. He did this to her 2-3 times a week.*
4. *A lady come in and said that her husband is having sex with their daughter. She asked me if she should stay with him.*

What is the correct and godly response in these situations? They do not fit into our rules. It is important to remember that the Bible is not a rule book, but that it lays out the principles by which you must live. You then extrapolate the rules from those principles.

▶ What are the principles about divorce and remarriage that we have seen already?

1. If an act of un-holiness ***defined by God*** is forced in your home or on you, then you have the right to leave.
2. If it is not an act of un-holiness, but you are just unhappy, then you can leave but you can never remarry.
3. If your holiness makes an unbelieving spouse leave, then you are free to remarry.
4. If your spouse leaves you, then you are free to remarry.

If you are a Christian and married to an unbeliever and he wishes to stay with you, then you may not be happy, but you cannot leave the marriage. Unhappiness is not a valid basis for divorce.

SEPARATION

Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-6

▶ What does this passage say is the basis for separation?

This passage talks primarily about a sexual separation. One valid reason is for a time of prayer.

Example: if you are living with an unbeliever that is verbally abusive, you have the right to separate and demand of him that he love you and get help for his problem. These are biblical concepts.

Verbal abuse does not constitute an act of un-holiness forced upon you that can lead to divorce. You can get separation and demand that he love you. If you do leave him, then you are not justified to remarry.

FORGIVENESS

Read 1 John 1:9

▶ If we disobey these principles for divorce can we be forgiven?

Yes you can be forgiven, but that does not remove the consequences. God is merciful to forgive us and restore us when we are repentant.

QUESTIONS BROUGHT UP IN ORIGINAL LESSON

1. Alcohol and drug addiction fit into the separation category. If you or your kids are in danger, then you must separate immediately. If you are not in danger, then this is not a valid basis for divorce.
2. Neglect falls into the category of unhappiness. You can separate, but this is not a valid basis for divorce and remarriage.