

The Bible and Divorce

Introduction

Marriage

- In 1862 50.0% of unmarried females got married
- In 1962 50.3% of unmarried females got married
- In 2008 19.6% of unmarried females got married

Divorce

- In 1858 there were 24 divorces
- In 1958 there were 22,654 divorces
- In 2008 there were 121,779 divorces

The peak was in 1993 with 165,018

Oh and by the way these numbers are just England & Wales, not Scotland nor Northern Ireland.

The Divorce Reform Act 1969 came into effect in England and Wales on 1 January 1971. The Act, subsequently consolidated in the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973, made it possible for the first time for divorce to be petitioned for on the couple's separation.

Two years separation is now all you need to be granted a divorce.

I believe that today many people are entering in to marriage with the feeling that "If it doesn't work out we can just get a divorce." And that is borne out by the fact that the majority of divorces are by people under 30 but older people are also getting divorced as the mean age is rising.

One in three children experience the breakup of their parents relationship before their 16th birthday.

These are all just facts about what is happening, but what does the Bible teach about divorce?

Marriage

If you want a divorce then the first thing you need to do is get married!

God's plan for marriage

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." **(Genesis 2:24 NIV)**

"'But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.'" **(Mark 10:6-9 NIV)**

From these verses it's clear that God's plan was that man & woman live in a permanent loving relationship and other scriptures confirm this.

- Romans 7
- 1 Corinthians 7

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Old Testament

"I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel," (Malachi 2:16 NIV)

So we have God declaring that marriage is forever and that he hates divorce so is that the end of the message?

I don't think so because in the law, in God's word for his people, Moses says:-

"If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house," **(Deuteronomy 24:1 NIV)**

So God who wants marriage to be permanent now introduces divorce so why?

It's not what God wants for us but it's what he allows.

New Testament

"'It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife,

except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery."

(Matthew 5:31-32 NIV)

So Jesus seems to confirm that God's plan is for marriage to be permanent and remarriage is not allowed except for 'marital unfaithfulness' (NIV) or 'fornication' (AV) this word is not just adultery otherwise Jesus would have used the more specific word.

But let's look at the other passages in the gospels where Jesus talks about the issue of divorce and remarriage.

*"Some Pharisees came to him **to test him**. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female', and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.""* **(Matthew 19:3-9 NIV)**

Here the Pharisees are not interested in Jesus' views on divorce; they are trying to trap him into denying God's law that divorce is ok!

"To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife." **(1 Corinthians 7:10-11 NIV)**

Why do marriages fail?

Jesus doesn't want us to divorce, he wants us to have a happy marriage but I also believe that God provided a way out of marriage not because he wants nor is happy about divorce but that he knows his creation

Our failure to live up to God's standards is called sin but as Geoff said last week, the sin which causes us to fail God's standards (including marriage failures) has been dealt with when Jesus died on the cross..

The problem with divorce is that not all of us have been though it and so we find it easier to be critical, we find it easier to be absolute about the issue when we in fact have (again as Geoff said) we have great big planks in our own eyes.

Let's examine another really well known time that Jesus was tested by the Pharisees:-

"One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Do not get divorced 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:35-40 NIV)

God's plan for all of us that we love him with everything we are and have and that we love our neighbour as ourselves.

In reality God knows we can't achieve that

I believe that there is a big gulf between what God wants for us and what God expects of us!

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:10 NIV)