

CAUTION: Most likely, *all* of us have either experienced the consequences of divorce, or know people who have. As we reflect on this issue, we must guard our attitude and actions toward those involved in a divorce, so that our lives will reflect both *truth* and *love*. We must also remember that we are responsible for *our* actions, regardless of the way others may respond.

DIVORCE

Some of the Issues...

Divorce and Love

Review 1 Corinthians 13. In what ways is divorce *compatible* or *incompatible* with the type of love described in this chapter?

Divorce and Marriage

According to God, how long does marriage last? (Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39)

What does God say about divorce? (Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9)

What does Psalm 15:4b says, about making promises. [Most people make a promise - a marriage vow - to the person they marry!]

What does God say about people who want a divorce? (Matthew 19:8; Mark 10:5)

If a person divorces and then marries someone else, what is the result? (Romans 7:3; Matthew 19:9; Mark 10:11-12)

Divorce and God's Blessings

The "oneness" of marriage goes far beyond the physical union. *Every* aspect of life is affected. Because of this, the consequences (and damage) that occurs in a divorce are much deeper - far beyond the mere termination of a physical union.

Can you expect God's blessing, if you choose to get a divorce? Why? (Malachi 2:13-16)

Applying the Word...

Consequences

What are some of the consequences of divorce that you have personally observed, or (if applicable) experienced? (Include not only consequences experienced by the two who are getting the divorce, but also consequences that others may experience.)

Your Response

Suppose you find yourself in a potential divorce situation. How should you respond? (Include the verses given previously, as well as 1 Corinthians 7:10-17.)

- A. If it is *you* who want the divorce, how should you respond?
- B. If it is *the other person* who wants the divorce, how should you respond?
- C. As a follower of Jesus, what must your goal be, when you respond to the other person?
- D. What must your focus be in *all* of life?

What about a Dangerous Situation?

Suppose you find yourself in a "dangerous" marriage situation?

- A. What are some of the principles mentioned above, that apply here?
- B. Does God always guarantee that we will have pleasant (or *safe*) circumstances in this present life? If not, then what *does* God promise us? (Romans 8:28; Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-3)
- C. What is the *worst* thing that can happen to a person who is in a dangerous situation? How does the Bible tell us to respond to this "worse case scenario"? Some of the verses listed previously may apply; as well as (in some cases) Matthew 10:28.

If it Is "Too Late" ...

If a divorce has already occurred, how does God require us to respond to the other person? (1 Corinthians 13; Matthew 5:43-48)

ARE THERE ANY EXCEPTIONS to these teachings and commands about divorce?

Yes, there is a *unique* exception found in the book of Matthew.

The Jews had a custom in which the man and the woman would be *legally bound* to each other, for a period of time *prior to* marriage. During this time, if it was discovered that one of the two was guilty of sexual immorality (fornication), this "pre-marriage agreement" would have to be *legally* broken - and this was called an act of "divorce." After this - and *only* after this - was the innocent person released to marry someone else.

What did Joseph consider doing, when he discovered that Mary was pregnant? (Matthew 1:18-19) [Note: Joseph had not yet been told that Mary's pregnancy was caused by the Holy Spirit. At this point, all evidence suggested that she was guilty of fornication.]

Was this something that a *righteous* person could do? (In other words, could Joseph do it without sinning?)

At this time, were they married? (Matthew 1:25)

At this time, was Mary still described as his "wife"? (Matthew 1:20, 24)

Since Matthew wrote his gospel to the *Jews* (who practiced this custom), he had to mention this "exception" when he wrote about divorce.

What is the "exception"? (Matthew 5:32; 19:9 - Note that the word "fornication," or "sexual immorality," is translated various ways in different translations, but it generally refers to sexual sin *outside* of marriage. In each of these passages, Matthew *contrasts* it with "adultery" - a sexual sin committed by *married* people.)

In contrast, Mark wrote to *non-Jews* who did not have this custom. Because of this, he did *not* need to include this "exception" in what he wrote. It would have made no sense to them.

What does Mark say? (Mark 10:11-12)

WHAT ABOUT MOSES' TEACHING ABOUT DIVORCE?

Sometimes, people use Moses' teaching about divorce (in Deuteronomy 24:1-4) as a "justification" for getting a divorce. They treat it as though Moses was granting them permission to do it!

Look at what Moses said (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) and read it carefully. Is he granting people *permission* to get divorces? Or is he giving restrictions to people who were *already* doing it?

Ultimately, it was God (not Moses) who gave us the Law of Moses. There are several other restrictions in this Law, concerning divorce and other sexual sins - and *none* of them grants permission for getting a divorce.

WHAT ABOUT THE SITUATION IN EZRA?

Read Ezra 10:2-3, 19 and Nehemiah 13:23-30.

In a world filled with idolatry, Israel was unique, in that it had a covenant relationship with the one true God. This resulted in great blessings, but it also gave them great responsibilities. It was a unique situation that is totally unlike what we have today.

Back then, one's *national* identity was almost always directly related to one's *religious* identity. One's nationality determined which God (or god) a person served. If the women mentioned in these verses had abandoned the pagan nations they came from, and had become Israelites (as did Rahab and Ruth - Hebrews 11:31, Ruth 1:16), it would not have been an issue. As it was, they continued to identify with the pagan nations (*and the false religious practices* of those nations), and thus introduced idolatry into the nation of Israel. (Note that they were still called *foreign* women, not converts to the God of Israel. They did not say, as Ruth did, "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God" - Ruth 1:16b.)

Because of this unique relationship that Israel had with God, the men described in these passages were sinning directly against *God*, as well as against the entire nation of Israel. To *not* send away these idolatrous wives was tantamount to rejecting God and claiming loyalty to the false gods of their wives.

Marriage to these foreign women was also an act comparable to treason, because of its devastating effect on the nation. Israel was surrounded by nations that wanted Israel to be destroyed - and Israel's survival was possible only as long as they worshiped and served the God who promised to protect and preserve them. Survival would be possible, only as long as they did not reject him. Read the warning in Leviticus 26.

In the situation described in Ezra, Israel had just experienced the very destruction that God had warned them about, in Leviticus 26. By marrying these foreign women, these men were going right back to the lifestyle that originally brought about that destruction.

In view of these issues, we can safely conclude that there is no parallel between this Old Testament situation and divorces that occur today. (There is also no indication that these people took other wives, but there is not enough information in this passage to know for sure what they did.)