

END-TIMES ISSUES

#114

Commandment #7 – Divorce issues (2); the O.T. regulations.

GOD DOESN'T TELL US TO KNOW ALL THE END-TIME DETAILS. HE TELLS US TO BE READY.

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1

IF SIN HAD NEVER ENTERED THE WORLD... HOW LONG WOULD A MARRIAGE HAVE LASTED?

... a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and **they will become one flesh.**

Genesis 2:24 (BSB)

... a married woman is **bound** by law to her husband **as long as he lives.** But if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage.

Romans 7:2 (BSB)

↳ It would have lasted *forever... an unending situation... for all eternity.*

- ✓ It would *not* have been a disappointment (as it is with many people today), because there was *no sin* in either of the two, to disrupt the oneness and harmony.

2

IF SIN HAD NEVER ENTERED THE WORLD... WHAT WOULD MARRIAGE HAVE BEEN LIKE?

The LORD God also said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. **I will make for him a suitable helper.**"

Genesis 2:18 (BSB)

THIS WAS GOD'S IDEA!! (HE DID NOT ASK ADAM FOR SUGGESTIONS.)

↳ We can only *guess... and today's guesses would be influenced by our perspectives as sinners.*

- ✓ Perhaps we could say that it would be *forever* increasing in the oneness of love, cooperation and joy. The *best* of our experiences (as sinners) could reflect only the *tiniest* amount of what they might have experienced in eternity – if we could comprehend it at all.

3

SINCE "GENDER" INVOLVES TWO ISSUES ... WHEN ARE PEOPLE CONSIDERED "MARRIED"?

biological (Genesis 1:27) and *relational* (Genesis 2:18, 23)

... and **they will become one flesh.**

Genesis 2:24b (BSB)

↳ WHEN THEY BECOME "ONE" *BIOLOGICALLY*?

↳ WHEN THEY BECOME "ONE" *RELATIONALLY*?

↳ These various issues are worth considering, when examining the topic of DIVORCE – *especially this last one.*

↳ People sometimes wonder at what point a couple should be considered "married" ...

- At the time they become "one flesh" during an "affair"?
- After they have been living together for a long while?
- Only if they have had an official wedding ceremony?

4

- ✓ Some might think that a *single biological act* means "marriage" – after all, the Apostle Paul applies the "one flesh" passage of Genesis to someone having union with a prostitute.

Or don't you know that **he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body?**

For it is said, "**The two will become one flesh.**"

1 Corinthians 6:16 (BSB); a reference to Genesis 2:24.

- ✓ Others will argue that there needs to be an official expression of *intent to remain together* for life (i.e., a **marriage ceremony**). This might mean that they would consider two people cohabiting for 50 years to be *still* unmarried. (Others might disagree strongly!)
- ✓ Others might argue that a wedding ceremony is meaningless if the two don't "come together." (Others might ask, What about Joseph and Mary, who were considered legally *married* for nearly a year before "coming together"?)

★ **The basic issue is this:** *If we obey Scripture, most questions will disappear. They will never need to be asked or debated.*

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- **What if sin had never entered the world?** *When* would people have been considered "married"? There is nothing to indicate that the two unions (the biological and the relational) would have ever been separated! It would have been *both* or *neither*.
- Here's a *suggestion* of how things might have been:
 - ✓ **Biologically:** You were either *united* or *not*. "All or none." Once united, you could never become "un-united." Perhaps you could compare this to an "off-on" switch – except that, once turned *on*, it could *never* be turned *off*.
 - ✓ **Relationally:** It would start at the same time.* But the *intensity* of the oneness in the relationship would *forever increase*. Perhaps you could compare this to a "dial" switch. Once you turned it "on" (at the moment of being united), it would *never* be turned "off," but would *forever* increase in intensity.

*(It would start *first*, if betrothal were involved.)

6

DIVORCE MESSES EVERYTHING UP.

• LAST TIME, we saw:

- ✓ In God's eyes, marriage was *never* intended to come to an end. It is only as a consequence of *sin* that it ends at *death*.
- ✓ God does not recognize marriage as ending at divorce. No matter *who* initiates the divorce, *any* marriage after divorce is *adultery* in his eyes (if the original spouse is still alive).
- ✓ The "exception clause" in Matthew has to do with *fornication*, not *adultery*. It applies to the *Jewish betrothal system*, in which a man and a woman are "married *without* consummation." Once they physically "come together," any sexual sin becomes *adultery*, not *fornication*. This means the "exception" does not apply to the modern concept of "marriage."

★ Yet there *are* regulations that seem to *permit* divorce and marriage after divorce. How are we supposed to deal with such regulations?

7

PERMISSION TO DIVORCE!!!

• This is the verse that people tend to zero in on ...

- ↳ Especially if it's what they already *want* to do (very often connected with plans to marry someone else).

YES!!!
THE VERSE I WAS
LOOKING FOR!!

If a man marries a woman, but she becomes displeasing to him because he finds some indecency in her, **he may write her a certificate of divorce**, hand it to her, **and send her away** from his house.

Deuteronomy 24:1 (BSB)

- ✓ People today – and many in Jesus' day – look at this Old Testament verse as a *permission* for them to do as they please. They find it convenient to *ignore* everything else the Old Testament says about divorce!
- ✓ Today, we have additional *New Testament* revelation that they *also* like to ignore (except when they *redefine* the "exception clause" and claim that it includes them).

8

Before basing our actions on Deuteronomy 24:1, we should see what else the Bible says about this issue. (It's not all about "go out and get the divorce you want"!)

• First, we need to make some observations:

- ✓ In **ancient societies**, families functioned as a *unit*, but with very specific roles. The absence of a husband often left the woman in a vulnerable situation – both in regards to provision, as well as for protection. In the matter of divorce, if there was no living parent or brother to support her, she would usually be faced with the *need* to have a husband, in order to survive. This is better than some of the alternatives that are sometimes taken (such as prostitution); so, we are going to have to consider this issue – though we should not use it to "cancel" what *Jesus* says about divorce in Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; and Luke 16:18.
- ✓ **Most passages** describe situations in which the *husband* would initiate the divorce – which was normally the way it happened, back then. (Today, statistics show that the wife usually initiates it.)

9

A warning about interpreting "Old Testament life," based on the way people live *today*:

- ✓ **Our views** on certain matters are determined by the *modern perspectives* that we have grown up with – which usually come from the *world*, rather than from *Scripture*. Because of this, it is only *natural* for us to *misunderstand* certain practices they had.
- ✓ **Our tendency** is to use *our* views to interpret *their* actions – which often makes us ready to judge (criticize and condemn) what they did. So, when they don't *do* things the way *we* do, and when they don't *interpret* life events the way *we* do, our tendency is to *assume* that *we* are "right" and *they* (i.e., people in the Bible) are "wrong" (or stupid, or backwards, or primitive, etc.).
- ✓ **To make matters worse**, the very *words* we use have been redefined in ways that *deny* and even *reject* what they meant when *they* used them. For example, *our* use of the word "slave" tends to imply "brutal, unwilling servitude." Yet in in the Old Testament era, it included situations where the person would *choose* to be a slave, instead of being "free." Look at Deuteronomy 15:12-18!

10

EXAMPLES of how perspectives are often very different:

✓ Viewing a person as "property":

- » We are usually told that it means: "I can misuse, abuse and brutally treat you any way I want." And we are told that this is the *only* way to understand that concept.
- » To them it meant: "I have an obligation to protect and provide for you; and you also have obligations [which would vary, according to the situation]." [Just like *today*, when one of the individuals would sin against the other in the relationship, the relationship would deteriorate. (The sin could occur in either direction, or both.)]

✓ The matter of "selling" a person:

- » We normally link this to someone being sold into sex slavery, or some other kind of brutal servitude. The person is often never seen again.
- » To them (assuming that they obeyed God's regulations), it could benefit everyone involved; it often meant moving into a better life situation; they remained a visible part of society. If things didn't work out, there were provisions to protect the person who was "sold."

11

"DIVORCE" – AN OVERVIEW OF WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS.

This topic is not the primary focus of Scripture; yet enough is given to teach us what type of attitude we should have toward it.

• First of all, GOD HATES IT.

1. Divorce, by definition, involves the breaking of one's *covenant*.
2. Because of it, your religious activities cease to have any meaning!

And this is another thing you do: You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and groaning, because **He no longer regards your offerings or receives them gladly from your hands.**

Yet you ask, "Why?"

It is because the LORD has been a witness between you and **the wife of your youth, against whom you have broken faith**, though **she is your companion and your wife by covenant.**

Malachi 2:13-14 (BSB)

MORE DETAILS

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3. Divorce is also an act of *violence*.
4. It involves the breaking of something that God has *united* – an echo of Genesis 2:24; also Matthew 19:5-6 and Mark 10:7-8.
5. It also tends to result in *unsaved* children, *not* "godly offspring."

Has not the LORD made them one, having a portion of the Spirit? And why one? **Because He seeks godly offspring.** So guard yourselves in your spirit and **do not break faith with the wife of your youth.**

"For **I hate divorce,**" says the LORD, the God of Israel. "**He who divorces his wife covers his garment with violence,**" says the LORD of Hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit and **do not break faith.**

Malachi 2:15-16 (BSB)

➡ **If God HATES it so much, then why did he permit it?** Jesus explains this in the New Testament (to be examined later).

We may find it interesting that, though God *hates* it, *he does not require a punishment for it.* (An issue we will need to examine.)

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- **Though God HATES divorce, he acknowledged that divorce would occur, perhaps even repeatedly.**

✓ He acknowledged not only the *initial* divorcing (Deuteronomy 24:1), but also the likelihood that divorced people would marry someone else... and potentially end up in *another* divorce.

... if [the **divorced** woman] becomes the wife of another man, and her **second husband** dislikes her and writes her a certificate of **divorce**, gives it to her and sends her from his house, ...

Deuteronomy 24:2b-a (NIV)



God also placed limits on divorcing, as well as protections for those most in danger of being destroyed by it. We already briefly mentioned some of the issues that a divorced woman would face; and some of the following regulations address such issues.

NOTE: The *reason* for some of the following regulations will not be easy to understand, without a serious examination of the nature of society at that time. This goes far beyond what we can do in our current study.

14

- **Legal protection and provision:**

✓ **A certificate of divorce.** This was considered part of the divorce procedure, which confirmed that the divorce was genuine. It provided some legal protections for the woman; also its permanency would restrain thoughtless, rash decisions that the husband would shortly regret.

If [a woman's husband] writes her a **certificate of divorce**, and... if [the divorced woman] becomes the wife of another man, and her **second husband** dislikes her and writes her a **certificate of divorce**, gives it to her and sends her from his house, ...

Deuteronomy 24:1b, 2b-3a (NIV)

CAUTION!!

Our tendency is to assume that the *husband* in this situation is in the wrong. But he may actually have *legitimate reasons* for initiating the divorce. God (as the "husband") describes himself as divorcing Israel (the northern kingdom, in Jeremiah 3:8; and Judah, in Isaiah 50:1); and in both instances, *they* (not God) were at fault.

15

✓ **Provision for a servant girl who was expected to eventually marry into the family** where she served – if, for whatever reason, it didn't happen – Exodus 21:7-9.

[Again, we would need to study ancient Jewish societal structure, in order to fully understand this. There are also some translation issues in verse 10, which add to the difficulty.]

✓ **Provision for a priest's daughter** – Leviticus 22:13. If she was divorced and she returned to her parent's home, she was permitted to eat the holy food that belonged to the priests – something that those outside the priest's family could not eat.

- **A legal obligation for a divorced woman:**

✓ **A divorced woman must keep any vows she makes** – Numbers 30:9. When she was part of the "husband-wife unit," her husband had the final say about what vows would be kept. As an *individual* (i.e., now divorced) she had to fulfill any vow she might make – even if she later regretted making the vow.

16

- **Limits on "re-marriage."**

✓ **Going back to a previous spouse (after marrying someone else) is forbidden** under *all* circumstances – Deuteronomy 24:1-4. It would *defile* the land – verse 4; see also Jeremiah 3:1.

- **Situations in which divorce is NOT permitted:**

(These are instances in which sin has been committed by the man. This may sound harsh to us – based on *our* views of marriage and society – but at that time, the harm that *any other situation* would have caused for the woman would have been *greater*.)

✓ **A situation in which a man falsely accused his wife of not being a virgin at marriage:** He could never divorce her – Deuteronomy 22:13-19.

✓ **A situation in which a man raped an unbetrothed virgin:** He could never divorce her – Deuteronomy 22:28-29.

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- **Situations in which marrying a divorced woman would NOT be permitted:**

(It is assumed that divorced women would likely get married again – since the alternatives were often even worse. But certain individuals, *because of their roles in society*, were not permitted to marry them. *See the context of each of these passages.*)

✓ **Priests** could not marry divorced women or women defiled by prostitution – Leviticus 21:7.

✓ **The High Priest** could marry *only* a virgin – not a divorced woman, a widow, or a woman defiled by prostitution – Leviticus 21:13-14.

✓ **The Priests described by Ezekiel** could not marry divorced women or widows from the general population, but only virgins from Israel or priest's widows – Ezekiel 44:22.

✓ **Note:** The New Testament also has regulations related to the marriages of leadership: Overseers, elders and deacons are all required to be "the husband of but one wife" - 1 Tim. 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6. (It's not our purpose here to debate what this might mean.)

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- A situation in which divorce was **mandatory** (= not applicable today):

This situation was totally *unlike* all others. These marriages involved *treason* against God, the ruler over Israel.

Because the sins of the Canaanites had reached the "point of no return," it was time for them to be destroyed. (God announced their destruction in the days of Abraham. He gave them over 600 years of opportunity to repent, before it had to happen.)

God warned the Israelites: The Canaanites need to be *destroyed*. Make no treaties with them; do not intermarry with them, *or Israel would be turned away from the true God, and would follow idols*. Then Israel would *also* have to be destroyed. Exodus 34:12-16; Deuteronomy 7:2-7.

They ignored God... and it happened *just as God said it would*.

When God allowed the Jews to return to the land of Israel, they started marrying Canaanites *again*. To prevent the return of God's righteous *wrath*, those guilty of this had to "send away" both the wives and their children (Ezra 10:2-3, 19), or be "driven away" themselves (Nehemiah 13:23-30). *Their sin caused these horrible (but necessary) consequences.* 19

EXAMPLES of divorce (or potential divorce) mentioned in the Bible:

(Obviously, listing divorces is not the focus of Scripture; but two situations are mentioned.)

- One of the Old Testament genealogies mentions a man who divorced two wives and married a third – 1 Chronicles 8:8.
- In the New Testament, Joseph considered divorcing Mary, not knowing that her pregnancy was caused by the Holy Spirit – Matthew 1:19. Had the pregnancy been caused by a man, it would have been by means of *fornication*, not *adultery*; because though married, they were still in the *betrothal* stage. They had not yet had sexual union – verse 25. Joseph could have still married another woman, without God considering it adultery for him to do so – as affirmed in Matthew 19:9.

THINGS HAVE CHANGED:

Today, $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of divorces are initiated by *women*. (Also, in most cases, one or both of the partners in the divorce have *already committed sexual sin, prior to marriage.*) 20

BASED ON ALL THESE THINGS, IF GOD IS SO OPPOSED TO DIVORCE, THEN WHY DOES HE PERMIT IT? WHY ALL THE REGULATIONS ABOUT IT?

Jesus tells us why:

Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because of your **hardness of heart**; but it was not this way from the beginning."

Matthew 19:8 (BSB)

But Jesus told them, "Moses wrote this commandment for you because of your **hardness of heart**."

Mark 10:5 (BSB)

- At this event, Jesus was talking to *men* – the religious leaders. But "hardness of heart" is not a "gender-specific" sin. Women can have hard hearts. Though in Israel (where Jesus was speaking), the focus would have been on the *men*, today it could be equally applicable to *either* men or women. 21

HARDNESS OF HEART?

- **Divorce is a horrible thing**, something that God hates (though not the *only* thing he hates).
 - ✓ It can have long-term devastating consequences on *many* people – not only on those who actively do (or cause) it, but others who are like "innocent bystanders" in the matter.
- **Yet it is not the ultimate issue**. It's a symptom of a *deeper* issue, here described as "hardness of heart." And we can expect God to be even *more* opposed to this hardness; for this is apparently where it all starts.
 - ✓ We might even ask, are there situations in which divorce is *necessary*, because of this deeper issue? (1 Corinthians 7 – which we will look at next time – mentions a potential example.)
- **To respond properly**, we may have to focus more on the *heart* issue, and the need to *repent* of any sinful *actions* and *attitudes* we may have.
 - ✓ If divorce has already occurred, then we will have to do whatever is possible to minimize the "symptoms" – the consequences that divorce has had on those involved, as well as others who are affected. 22

OUR MISSION: FOCUS ON GOD AND HIS TRUTH!

- ✓ **We will have to continue this issue next time**. At this point, (hopefully), we understand how complex the issue is.
 - ↳ It's *not* a simple matter of: "Let's do it and it's done!" It results in long-term consequences and damage for *many*.
 - ↳ Ultimately, we need to ask: Is divorce the *real* issue ... or just a symptom of something more serious.

But right now...

- ✓ **We need to consider what kind of loyalty we have to God and his Word**.
 - ↳ What type of commitment do we have, for attaining the "renewed mind" of Romans 12:2... and for living by it?
 - ↳ This will influence our attitude toward *all* matters in life. 23

Many in the "modern church" no longer accept what Scripture says on these issues, for it requires us to *reject* the prevailing views that are being promoted in society around us – views that many in the church have adopted as their own.

Credits

SCRIPTURE

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