



Till death do us part

Introduction:

We are commanded, in scripture, to keep the lifelong covenant of marriage. Divorce is a man-made, conscious decision to break that covenant, and is sadly part of our fallen reality. Divorce was never God's plan, but because of our fallen nature, God made some concessions for those who need to get out of dangerous/harmful marriage situations. But the concessions for divorce was never a free-for-all, "get out of jail free" card. For Christians, it is essential to view both marriage and divorce from a biblical view, and not adopt the culture's view, which seems, at times, optional or even one of convenience.

Today's message should encourage marrieds to step up and fiercely protect and fight for a great and meaningful marriage because it is permanent in God's eyes. It should also give those who are already divorced the chance to reflect Biblically on all that was. Whether divorced, married or single, we all need to regularly take stock of where our beliefs have drifted off to, because our beliefs will ultimately drive our behavior. What we believe about marriage will determine its outcome, when we hit difficult times.

We pray that spending time in this text will be constructive and healing for both married and divorced people within our community, and give singles a lens for what God expects from marriage. Perhaps this will prevent some from committing too frivolously, and call others to step up and take their current commitment more seriously - all to God's glory and our good.

Today's Scripture Text

1 Corinthians 7:10-16, 39-40

Sermon Points

#1. Marriage is a lifelong covenant

- Read 1 Corinthians 7:10-11,39-40 & Matthew 19:4-6

Paul's statement about people divorcing each other was not his own idea, but Christ's. Jesus was very clear on his view of marriage. We see this in his interaction with the Pharisees who were testing him in this regard. He clearly taught them that marriage was God's plan, and therefore no human being should ever mess with or break it up. Right from creation, God joined man and woman together in marriage, in a lifelong covenant.



As we know, when humanity sinned and began to live out of their fallen nature, everything good, including marriage, began breaking down and causing pain and harm. To try and manage this, Moses made the concession of divorce for those who were stuck in adulterous marriages, or those whose spouses had abandoned them - in order to survive. Of course, this was never part of the plan for human flourishing, but served the people who were in relational crises, which could not be solved.

But as usual, over time, culture perverted the concession, until divorce was seen even by religious leaders, as an option for multiple reasons. When Jesus was confronted on the issue of divorce by the religious leaders of the day, he sternly reminded them of the seriousness and permanence of marriage, and rebuked them for their selfish and ungodly views on marriage. The covenant of marriage, through its lifelong commitment, love and sacrifice is supposed to reveal to us how Christ loves the church.

#2. God expects us to keep our lifelong covenant

- Corinthians 7:10-13

Paul's letter to the Corinthians addressed the questions and assumptions that they had in trying to live as Christians within the existing culture. They didn't have hundreds of churches around them showing them the way to go. Naturally, there were some issues that they could not agree on, and Paul was their "go-to" guy. Some of the Corinthian believers were concerned about whether to remain married to their spouses who had not followed them in their faith. They didn't yet have the grounding from the scriptures to know that marriage was a lifelong covenant, instituted by God, which Paul helped them to understand.

We live in different times. Because of our access to the whole Bible, we know that as believers, we are only to marry those within the faith. However, some of us got married before we knew this, or got saved once we were already married. Of course, this scenario brings with it a lot of heartache and potential struggle for both husband and wife. But Paul makes it clear that regardless of whether both partners are believers or not, marriage is still a lifelong covenant that rests under the blessing God, and should be kept as such until death parts them.

Marriage is far greater than just the couple involved. Knowing that marriage reflects Christ's love for the church should give even more weight to one's marriage. Christ loved the church so much that he gave up his life for her. He remains committed to her, even when she is unfaithful to him. He cherishes, blesses and keeps her secure, knowing that at the end of the age he will return for her, where he will fully restore her. Christ's union with the church his bride, is eternal.

#3. Divorce needs to be viewed through the lens of the lifelong covenant

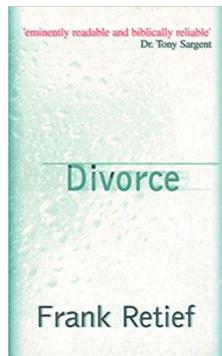
- Read 1 Corinthians 7:12-16

Though lifelong marriage was always the plan, our sin has, at times, damaged marriage beyond repair. In one or two of those circumstances, scripture makes concession for divorce – such as in the case of adultery or in the



case of abandonment, which would include abuse. But in this text, Paul makes concession for divorce in the instance when an unbelieving spouse chooses to leave the marriage.

For those who are struggling in marriage, it is a good time to pause and reflect on why your marriage is not reflecting Christ's love for the church. If you are the guilty one, admit your sin and repent - seek restoration and work towards a lifelong healthy marriage. If you are the one suffering because of your spouse's sin, do you need to forgive your spouse and to reconcile as much as you can? If you need help, reach out. The church would love to help direct you in getting your marriage back on track. Many of us need help when we realise how bad we have let our marriages get. Do not let pride or shame hold you back. For those who are already divorced, take the time to reflect on what happened. For those who would like to read on this difficult topic, we recommend the following book by Frank Retief, which you can order on Amazon.com.



- ♣ Marriage is a lifelong covenant. Why it is important to acknowledge that this is God's design, which cannot be changed or altered, according to the prevailing culture?
- ♣ What picture does marriage paint for us about God, and why is this significant?
- ♣ If we are blasé about our marriages, and do not work to love our spouses sacrificially, what picture are we painting of Christ's love for us?
- ♣ Why did Moses give concessions for divorce in extreme circumstances, even though marriage is a lifelong covenant?
- ♣ How can we, as a community, help one another to keep the covenant of marriage strong, stable and loving, so that we all reflect Christ well?
- ♣ What can a struggling couple do to prevent their marriage from unravelling, now that they have been convinced through scripture that they are in a lifelong covenant?
- ♣ For those who find themselves divorced, what advice would you give to married people that could help them learn from your past struggles?
- ♣ For most people, divorce is life-altering and devastating. God never wanted this for his people, but it is a common reality because people sin against each other. How can we come alongside those who are already divorced, and help them along their path to recovery?