

How should Christians respond?

- A wife is in a physically abusive marriage to an alcoholic man who has no interest in getting help. She asks if she divorces him can she remarry?
- A Christian couple get divorced for ambiguous reasons. They want to know if the Scripture permits them to marry another believer?
- A Christian wife discovers that her Christian husband has been unfaithful and is unrepentant. She does not want out but he does. If he divorces her is she free to remarry? Does this change if he remarries?
- Two people (both of whom were married and divorced before becoming Christians) want to get married. Their former spouses are not Christians but have not remarried. Are they free to remarry?

How should Christians respond?

- Until the beginning of the 19th cent. the answers would be relatively clear and simple. Divorce was rarely allowed and remarriage was seldom permitted.
- Today, the answers are also simple. Divorce is seen as often necessary and remarriage is always possible.
- The Biblical teaching challenges both responses in ways that make this issue among the most difficult ethical challenges that followers of Christ will ever face.

Biblical teaching and modern culture

Transcribers

The Biblical message is applied **literally** to modern society with little or no attention to the differences between modern culture and Biblical culture.

We simply transcribe the Biblical text in a literal way to our present situation.

Translators

The Biblical message is applied in **principle** to modern society giving careful attention to the unique cultural settings of both the Biblical text and the present.

We translate the Biblical message in a way that directs its principle teaching to our present situation.

Transformers

The Biblical message is freely **altered** to fit the values of modern culture.

We change the Biblical message or select only portions of it that seem to fit the common sense of the modern situation.

Jesus' teaching *seems out of touch.*

Matthew 19

"⁹ 'And I say to you. whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another **commits adultery.**' ¹⁰ The disciple said to Him, 'If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry'."

Jesus respects the principle of *"damage control."*

"⁸ He said to them, '**Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce** your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.'"

Paul builds on Jesus' teaching.

1 Corinthians 7

"¹⁰ But to the married I give instructions, **not I but the Lord**, that the wife should not leave her husband ¹¹ (but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not send his wife away."

Repeating Jesus' teaching - in Matt.5,19.

Marriage is until death do us part - no divorce and if divorced no remarriage.

Jesus addresses the family of faith - not the mixed marriage or those outside the covenant of faith.

Like Jesus, Paul respects the principle of *damage control.*

1 Corinthians 7

"⁶ But this I say by way of **concession, not of command.** ⁷ Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own **gift from God**, one in this manner, and another in that. ⁸ But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. ⁹ But if they do not have **self-control**, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn."

God has created us with different strengths and weaknesses. - that may dictate different ethical choices.

The "single life" is respected. - Paul advocates the single life because of the cultural circumstances.

1 Corinthians 7

“¹² But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away. . . . ¹⁵ Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is **not under bondage** in such cases, but God has called us to peace.”

Mixed marriage - The context switches to a mixed marriage which Jesus did not address.

Freedom - “not under bondage” = free to remarry (Rom.7:2, 1 Cor.7:39 “death” = not bound and free to remarry in the Lord.)

Annulment - Ezra 9-10 annulled mixed marriages as a part of renewing the faith community in the 5th cent. B.C.

1 Corinthians 7:27-28

“²⁷ Are you **bound** to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you **released** from a wife? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸ But if you should marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin should marry, she has not sinned.”

Freedom - The “you” of vs.28 stands parallel to the “virgin” suggesting that Paul has a divorced person in mind when he says “But if you should marry, you have not sinned”

Key question - Is the context that of a mixed marriage where the unbeliever has left or is it more general.

In the case of a broken mixed marriage Paul teaches that the believer is free to remarry but his advice is that a person remain single.

Three positions held by Christians

- **Annulment (unlawful marriage)**, but not divorce, is recognized by God with the freedom to remarry. *Catholic view*
- Divorce is valid under certain circumstances but **remarriage is not permitted**. *Historical Protestant view*
- Divorce (for whatever reason) implies the **freedom to remarry**. *Popular view of our culture today*

Pastoral wisdom

Three critical considerations

Respect for the institution of marriage -

A Covenant



The sacred covenant of marriage

A provision for personal intimacy

A reflection of the image of God

A needed environment for child development

A picture of Christ's relationship with the church



A Covenant

- **Marriage is at the core of family values.** It is the cornerstone of civilized life.
- **The Marriage Covenant is serious.** Far more serious than our culture and many Christians realize.
- **Marriage in God's eyes is terminated only by death or annulment.** Divorce is not an option determined primarily by our comfort or fulfillment.

Pastoral wisdom

Three critical considerations

Respect for the institution of marriage -

A Covenant



Respect for the hardness of heart -

A Concession



Damage control is a Biblical principle.

- “because of your hardness of heart” Matt. 19:8
- “because of immoralities” 1 Cor.7:2
- “by way of concession” 1 Cor.7:6
- “lack of self-control” 1 Cor.7:9
- “God has called us to peace” 1 Cor.7:15
- “consent of the unbeliever” 1 Cor.7:15
- “in view of the present distress” 1 Cor.7:26
- “to sanctify the family” 1 Cor.7:14

Graded Absolutes

- when you have competing ethical responsibilities you must use wisdom in choosing the lesser of two evils.

Taking of life

Truth telling

Social Injustice (short term)

Political legislation

Unlawful entry

Divorce & remarriage



A Concession

- **The Fall has made a mess of life.** Irreconcilable moral conflicts exist.
- **We are imperfect people in an imperfect world.** We sometimes have to make choices between equally unattractive and even evil options.
- **Perfection is not an option.** In the end all will be O.K. If it is not O.K. it is not the end.

Pastoral wisdom

Three critical considerations

Respect for the institution of marriage -

A Covenant



Respect for the hardness of heart -

A Concession



wisdom

Respect for the cleansing of the Gospel -

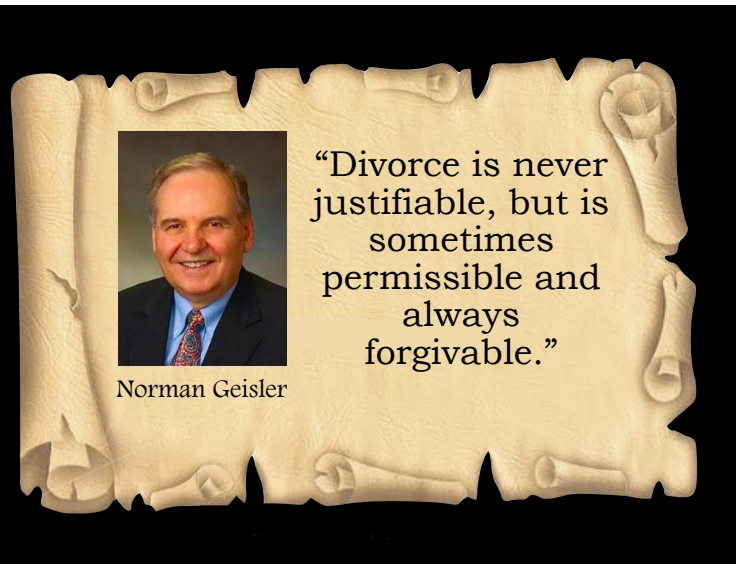
A Cross



A Cross

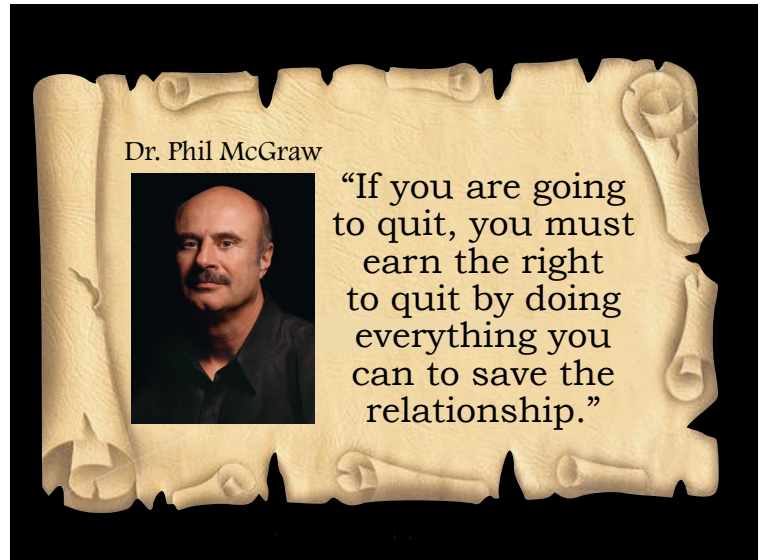
- **Self sacrifice is fundamental to Christian marriage.** Dying to self is the door to living for Christ.
- **Spiritual warfare is at the foot of the Cross.** Marriage and the family are battlefields. We dare not be AWOL.
- **We must pick up the pieces.** This starts with appreciation for God's plan but also demands that we accept God's grace to forgive ourselves and others.

Don't let
yesterday use
up too much
of today.



Conclusions

- Legitimate marriages between two Christians are not to be dissolved. If there is a separation there is no freedom to marry another without being guilty of adultery.
- In a broken world "damage control" is often needed and must be respected (Deut.24:1).
Divorce is recognized in a fallen world, but it is not God's will or perfect plan.
Remarriage is controversial but not unforgivable.
- In the case of mixed marriages the believer is to strive to preserve the relationship but if the unbeliever departs the believer may be free to remarry in that the first marriage is annulled as with a mixed marriage in the day of Ezra.
- In marriages and divorces before coming to Christ, grace is to apply.



Earning the right to a "Christian" divorce

- ✓ Have you made marriage a sacrificial ministry?
- ✓ Have you done everything within reason to build and save the marriage?
- ✓ Have you sought outside help early?
- ✓ Are you able to do this out of love not anger or fear?
- ✓ Are you committed to picking up the pieces after a divorce?
- ✓ Are you ready and able to forgive?



"I want the kind
of marriage that
makes my kids
want to get
married and
stay married."