



In Sickness and in Health
Matthew 19:3-6

3 The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?"

4 And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,'

5 "and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?

6 "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

Several years ago, while I was on the session of another church, we went through the difficult process of disciplining and then eventually excommunicating an older married man who had begun an affair with another woman. His wife had Alzheimer's and he felt that as she had had this condition for quite some time and couldn't really function as wife for him any longer that it was his right to find another woman who could. We spent months attempting to persuade him that his reasoning was unsound and unchristian and to remind him that the marriage vows that he had taken to his wife were *"for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward until death do us part."* And that it was his calling to love and cherish her even in this time of sickness. He never did agree with that and refused to break off his extramarital relationship, and eventually it was our sad duty to excommunicate him.

I was reminded of that when recently when the news broke that Pat Robertson had added "Alzheimer's" to the reasons for which someone might get a lawful divorce.

He had taken a call from someone who said his friend was getting a lot of flak because he wanted to divorce his wife who had Alzheimer's and find someone who could "meet his needs"

Robertson assured him that the dementia-riddled wife is, "not there" anymore and that it would be ok to get a divorce his cohost incredulous prompted him isn't marriage is "Till Death Do Us Part" to which Robertson said yes but Alzheimer's is "A Kind of Death?"

Is that REALLY the case??? Well no. There is nothing in scripture to back that up. Nothing that says you are married till your spouse becomes sick.

What we have here is precisely what the Westminster Confession of Faith warns against in chapter 24.6: “Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage”

and then it reinforces the point that “yet, nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church, or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage”

What we have though in the church is pervasive problem of what I call “theological backfill” – when we have a question or a problem, we don’t go to scripture and determine what it teaches and then follow it, we decide what we WANT and then create a theological basis for it

I’ve seen this in the PCA – Irremediable desertion is a cause for divorce “Emotional Desertion” as a form of divorce, they argue all the time and are verbally abusive to one another:

I once Have you ever encountered a couple who are about to divorce who are on perfectly amicable terms? Because the ones I encounter can’t be civil to one another for even a few seconds.

Women preaching, you can create a theological basis for that too!

1 Tim. 2:12 And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. Oude becomes And we translate it that way and then...

But what does scripture tell us about the nature of marriage? It says it is designed to mirror the relationship between Christ and His Bride the Church, that is the Believers who are united to Him, who have entered into that Covenant relationship. Christ will be their savior, sustainer, and her sanctifier, and they will follow Him forsaking all others. We saw an example of that covenant this morning when Ty joined the church. But the sacrificial nature is perhaps best illustrated in scripture in Eph. 5:22-33

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.

30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

33 Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Love here in Christian marriage is defined by the sacrifice of Christ for his bride the church, it is not merely the initial surge of romance that most marriages begin with, but a willingness to lay down one's life for one's spouse. The Christian is constantly reminded that in this passage we are to love and respect our husband or our wife as Christ does the church, and to do so as an act of piety. Our devotion to our spouse should stem from a desire to glorify Christ, and therefore the origin of that devotion should be our love to Christ, not the lovableness of our spouse. This is critical because very few marriages will always consist of two lovable partners, marriage is a life-long union of two sinners and there will usually be times when husband or wife has great difficulty even liking their spouse, much less loving them. Therefore often, being married will involve dying to self and remembering that we vowed to love and cherish our spouse not just in the better times, but in the worse ones as well.

That sacrifice is not popular with worldlings and the language of our marriage vows based on a Christian worldview is disappearing. This view of marriage as a lasting covenant that is intended to reflect the covenant that Christ has with his bride the church is being replaced with a worldly and frankly unrealistic romantic relationship. Marriage is seen as an equal partnership these days based on emotion and as a result those lasting covenantal marriage vows based on the bible are being systematically replaced with vows that are inherently impermanent.

This decline isn't new though, it began decades ago. For instance, in the 1970s TV show Rhoda which was about a sassy young feminist "pushed the envelope" and mildly shocked viewers when during the episode where Rhoda gets married, they changed the wedding vow from "As long as you both shall live," to "as long as you both shall love."

Now vows like that have become depressingly commonplace: "For as long as we continue to love each other," "For as long as our love shall last" and "Until our time together is over"

There is no sacrifice, no lasting union, and a tremendous self-centeredness, and such vows are an acknowledgement that the marriage is doomed from the outset because because it is rarely the case that a marriage does not pass through periods where both spouses love each other, particularly in the rocky early years of marriage where couples lacking experience and wisdom and still used to independence argue and fight the most. This can't be the course that we follow in the church though. We must preach a view of marriage that transcends this idea that it depends upon what our spouse can do for us and instead adopt the biblical view of marriage that takes its lead from the relationship between Christ and the Church:

Russell Moore, in an article on this problem stated, *"If our churches are to survive, we must repudiate this ... But beyond that, we must train up a new generation to see the gospel embedded in fidelity, a fidelity that is cruciform."*

It's easy to teach couples to put the "spark" back in their marriages, to put the "sizzle" You can still worship the self and want all that. But that's not what love is. Love is fidelity with a cross on your back"

Applications:

1) Don't be constantly seeking reasons to put your own marriage asunder. Don't "Blow Up" your marriage

Proverbs 14:1 The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish pulls it down with her hands.

Avoid lingering by the exit door, wall it up.

2) Their souls are not lost!

David Jeremiah - Bob Evans

“But the great miracle of the day came later. To close the service we had chosen Mama's favorite hymn, "Fairest Lord Jesus." And now as I stood singing it I heard, behind me in the pew, Mama's voice singing too. Word after word, verse after verse, she joined in, Mama who could not speak four words, singing the beautiful lines without a stammer. Her voice which had been so high and clear was hoarse and cracked, but to me it was the voice of an angel. All the way through she sang, while I stared straight ahead, not daring to turn around for fear of breaking the spell. When at last everyone sat down, Mama's eyes, Betsie's, and mine were brimming with tears. At first we hoped it was the beginning of Mama's recovery. But the words she had sung she was not able to say, nor did she ever sing again. It had been an isolated moment, a gift to us from God, His own very special wedding present. Four weeks later, asleep with a smile on her lips, Mama slipped away from us forever.” – Hiding Place

3) Remember the Gospel:

When we needed Him most, when we had no capacity to help ourselves when were spiritual Christ made the ultimate sacrifice for us:

Romans 5:6 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.

8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

With that in mind will we desert our own spouses at exactly the time they need us the most?

Jesus tells us he is present in the weak, the vulnerable, the useless. He is there in the least of these (Matt. 25:31-46). Somewhere out there right now, a man is wiping the drool from an 85 year-old woman who flinches because she think he's a stranger. No television cameras are around. No politicians are seeking a meeting with them. But the gospel is there. Jesus is there.