**Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage**

This is not my area… It is more of a shepherding than a teaching issue, but…

1. God hates divorce. Surely Matthew 19:1-9 is the most important biblical passage on divorce, but let us start with Malachi 2:15-16. “I hate divorce” The man who divorces his wife does violence to the one he should protect.

2. Matthew 19:1-9 Marriage for life is God’s plan. He made allowance to Israel only because of their hard hearts. In the spirit of Matt 5:17f (unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees…) Jesus declares divorce to be a sin.

3. Matt 19:9 does make an exception in the case of adultery.

19:10 Looking at their response, they realized this was a serious command.

The only acceptable reason for a divorce between two disciples of Jesus is because one has been sexually unfaithful.

But…. Forgiveness is possible and, I assume is the preferred path. I fear that some are hoping their spouse will be unfaithful so that they can get out of their marriage.

Q: What about physical or emotional abuse? Answer: Separation is possible and in some cases perhaps even advisable.

Q: If such a divorce happens, is the offending spouse free to remarry in the church?

Answer: Opinions differ on this. My suggestion is that such a believer accept the consequences for his/her sin and remain single.

An important point: There are two categories: What we allow and forgive and what we support. I would not support the remarriage of the one who offended, and I suggest the church do the same, but can we stop someone from doing this and can we ban them from the church?

Aside: What about pornography? Could continued, habitual pornography be equivalent to being maritally unfaithful?

Q: What about a marriage and divorce that occurred before either was a Christian?

Answer: Nearly all agree that what happens outside the church is not the church’s business and such sins are washed away at baptism. But some disagree…

1 Cor 7:10-11 Paul confirms what Jesus taught. Separation is generally ill-advised, but divorce of married Christians is sinful and unacceptable. Notice the emphasis on reconciliation.

4. 1 Cor 7:12-14 This applies ONLY to a Christian who is married to an unbeliever. Presumably, the conversion came after the marriage. In this case, if the unbelieving spouse sues for divorce, then the believing spouse is “not bound” (v. 15). Some in the CoC teach that the spouse is not bound to stay married, but cannot remarry. I strongly disagree with this interpretation. What else could “not bound” mean in this situation.

But…..

1. This should be a last resort. I have known spouses who were hoping they would be given this option.

2. It MUST not be the believer who initiates this process. (v. 12-13) Note he mentions both genders to solidify his point.

Aside: What does “sanctified” mean in 7:14? Not sure.

Q: What if he/she is abusive or neglectful? Answer: Separation is possible, but not divorce.

Q: What if the believer disobeys this command and pursues divorce anyway, can she/he remarry? Opinions in our churches vary. My opinion, such a person ought to reconcile or stay single.

Other cases (and there are many)

Q: What about a couple who leave the church, get divorced, remarry others, and try to come back?

(sometimes they leave for this very reason!)

Answer: The general consensus is that although we find this to be very distasteful, what occurs outside the church we have no influence over. Most will take the disciple back.

Again, what we accept with reservation and what we support are two different things.

Summary:

God hates divorce (and so should we)

Marriage is for life

Adultery allows for (but does not require) divorce, and leaves the offended spouse free to remarry.

Divorce instigated by a non-Christian spouse is acceptable and leaves the disciple free to remarry.