

"1 Getting up, He *went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds *gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them. 2 Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. 3 And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" 4 They said, "Moses permitted a man TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY." 5 But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. 6 "But from the beginning of creation, God MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. 7 "FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, 8 AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." 10 In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. 11 And He *said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; 12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery." Mark 10:1-12, NAS95.

Let me begin with the final statement from the previous message on this text.

So the Lord Jesus appeals to Genesis one and two, to the divine origin of mankind, of man and then of woman. Now we know those great words of John about Christ, that without him was not anything made that was made whether it was powers or authorities, he made them. In other words, Jehovah-Jesus made Adam and Eve, and marriage, and Jesus explains the nature of marriage to us. Now that again is something that these Pharisees never grasped, that the divine designer of marriage and the creator of man and woman was actually telling them all about it there that day in the region of Judea.

Let me illustrate this point in this way. In Australia you have one of the oldest cultures in the world. There are aborigine wall paintings that go back many thousands of years, and you can have an Aborigine tour guide whose culture has not changed very much since the time his ancestors painted those figures, and he has access to them. He understands and can explain them to you. What would you think of a living culture group in France today, the members of whom knew instinctively and comprehensively the meaning of the fabulous cave drawings that are found in certain parts of France? Wouldn't that be remarkable? "This is what these signs and figures represent," they could tell you.

This is what we have here. The God who made man and woman and marriage itself has himself become a man, and he is now telling us what marriage is, but what is more

remarkable is that he does so by citing words from a book. He quotes from Genesis chapters one and two. First, Jesus quotes from Genesis 1:27 which tells us how gender, sexual differentiation, is part of the most fundamental nature of our structure as human beings: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Do you understand the significance of those words? Maleness and femaleness are part of our being created in the image of God.

The second passage quoted by the Lord is found in Genesis 2 and there we find a more complete report of the way woman was created. It is a completely supernatural event. There is no way that the creation of woman can be explained by means of evolution. Let us read a few verses leading up to the actual words which Jesus quotes in our text:

"20 The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." Genesis 2:20-24, NAS95.

Then the Lord Jesus gives his own commentary on those words here in Mark, saying, "So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (vv. 8&9).

IN MARRIAGE A MAN AND A WOMAN BECOME ONE FLESH.

"One flesh," Jesus says. "They are no longer two, but one," he emphasizes. In other words, marriage is a permanent relationship. Compare a sperm and an egg that unite and that one new cell multiplying and multiplying until a baby is born. The coming together of those two elements makes one new person permanently. Marriage is to be considered in that way. The two become one flesh. What should we think of this "one flesh" idea? Naturally we regard it as having reference to the sexual union that is a part of marriage. Joel Nederhood has said, "We generally think of sexual intercourse as being rather 'fleshly,' often in contrast to the more spiritual elements of our lives. And surely the union is very close and intimate, even to the point where the two people might be called one. And because this 'one flesh' idea is so easily related to the sexual

dimension of marriage, some have concluded that a marriage shouldn't be dissolved, because once a couple has shared such intimacies, it would be improper for them to leave each other."

However, let us see this oneness in the context of the creation of Eve. Adam says quite deliberately about her, "This is flesh of my flesh." John Stott says about this, "This is teaching that heterosexual intercourse in marriage is more than a union; it is a kind of reunion. It is not a union of alien persons who don't belong to one another and cannot appropriately become one flesh. On the contrary, it is the union of two persons who originally were one, were then separated from each other, and now in the sexual encounter of marriage come together again. It is surely this that explains the profound mystery of heterosexual intimacy, which poets and philosophers have celebrated in every culture. It is much more than a union of bodies; it is a blending of complementary personalities through which, in the midst of prevailing alienation, the rich, created oneness of human being is experienced again."

A husband and a wife complement one another. I don't mean that they take it in turns to say pleasant things about the other, but that each supplies what the other lacks. Think of a glove complementing a hand on a cold day. They go together and the person is more comfortable as a result. So a man and a woman complement one another physically, and also at a deeper level because God built differences into his design of the man and the woman whom he created. When Eve was taken out of Adam's side they were apart, but as they came together in marriage then that 'oneness' of being human was restored.

So the only relationship that can be considered to be marriage is what occurs between a man and a woman who publicly enter the marriage state by means of the marriage ceremony, and those who enter this state have the obligation before God and before man to remain faithful to one another for their entire life. They cleave to one another. As Jesus says, man must not try to separate what God has joined together. So marriage is very different from what people often view as marriage these days.

Marriage is a bond between two people that is so deep and so profound that both of them are inescapably affected by it. It is so profound that once a person is married, everything he thinks about involves the person to whom he is married. A husband and a wife have become one flesh. They are no longer two, but one. One. One. One. This word must be stressed over and over again.

ARE THERE NO GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE?

Are there no grounds for Christians to divorce? Yes, there are two mentioned in the Scriptures. The first is adultery, and we find a reference to this in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:32, "anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress." The phrase 'marital unfaithfulness' refers to all types of sexual immorality. Outside of marriage it means fornication; within marriage it means adultery. Marital unfaithfulness is a ground of divorce because it violates the marriage bond. Should a husband raise the children of his wife that he thinks are his own children, but they're not? She has been unfaithful to him and the children are those of another man.

The other ground of divorce in the Bible is being abandoned by an unbelieving husband or wife. I Corinthians 7:15, "If the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances." Marriage can be pictured as an easy yoke that joins together a man and a woman. Then one day the non-Christian tells his yoke-fellow who has become converted, "I've had enough. I'm going," and he leaves her. Now see her walking on through life so awkwardly, a yoke across one of her shoulders, the other yoke sticking out into space. Is she going to go on through the rest of her life like that? No husband, and yet the evidence there that once she was married? No, Paul says. Let him go. Take off the yoke from your shoulders. You are not bound in such circumstances. You may remarry a Christian. Those are the two reasons that the Puritans themselves wrote in the Westminster Confession of Faith 450 years ago as the grounds of divorce. Our Lord Jesus, knowing the hardness of men's hearts, has given to his church these two cases whereby Christians may remarry after a divorce.

Yet no Christian should enter marriage thinking that there are two back doors out if things go wrong. There is no back door. That is the only way to think and act if you are contemplating marriage. This is a lifelong union. The apostle Paul learned this lesson from his Lord very well, and when he opens up this theme of marriage in his letter to the Ephesians he says that, "husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself" (Ephs. 5:28). This is astonishing, but this is God's explanation of marriage.

Every husband feels this. He looks at his praying wife; the power of her righteousness; her time spent with the children; her ministry to them; her love for whatsoever things are true and noble and of good report; her care for her own parents. What formidable strengths, and these have become his own strengths. I think of one of my colleagues in the ministry and the long illness his wife suffered and the way he dedicated his life to caring for her, how at the end he had to wait on her hand and foot. Who would tell a preacher with a seriously ill wife that in order to care for the congregation he ought to have put her in an institution, get a divorce and move on to another church married to someone stronger? No Christian will say that because we know that the wife's sickness was his sickness. On the other hand, his strength was her strength. So the two lived out the fullness of their lives together complementing one another's strengths and weaknesses. They were one; they were one flesh in the deepest and fullest sense of that truth.

GOD'S DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE.

So we have come to God's definition of marriage: "Marriage is the lifelong union between a man and a woman whereby they become one flesh, and, as such, they express the image of God in their lives." That is it. That is what the church tells the world. The children in our schools are given a very different definition which must be wide enough to cover any kind of relationship between two men, or two women, or temporary live-in members of the opposite sex. This Christian definition seems to come from another planet: "Marriage is the lifelong union between a man and a woman

whereby they become one flesh, and, as such, they express the image of God in their lives." Well, it probably sounds as if it is from another planet because it's a divine revelation. The one who made marriage explains marriage in that way in the Bible. The Lord Jesus makes that definition very clear when his listening disciples have been mulling over all they have heard. "When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, 'Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery'" (vv. 11&12). You cannot avoid what he is saying. Christ wasn't being legalistic, but all of us have to make spiritual and moral judgments in this realm.

Today,(Aug.27,2008) the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community lost an iconic leader and a beloved friend. Del Martin, 87, passed away in San Francisco with Phyllis Lyon, her lifelong partner and spouse, by her side. Martin was one of the nation's first and most visible lesbian rights activists who dedicated her life to combating homophobia, sexism, violence, and racism. Martin's many contributions to the LGBT movement will resonate for decades to come.Source: miamiherald.typepad.com

Martin, 87, who wed Phyllis Lyon, 83, in San Francisco's City Hall in June, died of natural causes at the University of California San Francisco Medical Center on Wednesday morning, the National Center for Lesbian Rights said. The same-sex couple also had been the first in California to marry in San Francisco's 2004 "Winter of Love," when Mayor Gavin Newsom opened the door to gay marriage. Those unions were annulled, but an ensuing legal battle ended this summer with court backing of same-sex marriages. A stampede of marriages followed.Source: reuters.com

It is important for congregational decisions and for the discernment necessary in the officers of the church who do not want to grieve the Spirit of Christ, to know what the Bible teaches. It is important that there be harmony between pulpit and pew on this issue. And for the mere disciple whose conscience is sensitive to the Word and the Spirit, it is of greatest importance that he or she knows what is right or wrong. If we ministers are silent on these areas there is no doubt that the standards of the world will become the standards of the Lord's people.

After months of revived debate over divorce and its increasing acceptance among Americans, a new study affirmed born again Christians are just as likely as the average American couple to divorce.

The Barna Group found in its latest study that born again Christians who are not

evangelical were indistinguishable from the national average on the matter of divorce with 33 percent having married and divorced at least once. Among all born again Christians, which includes evangelicals, the divorce figure is 32 percent, which is statistically identical to the 33 percent figure among non-born again adults, the research group noted.

"There no longer seems to be much of a stigma attached to divorce; it is now seen as an unavoidable rite of passage," George Barna, who directed the study, stated in the study, which was released Monday.

Results of the study come less than a year after a high-profile Christian couple - Randy and Paula White - announced their decision to split, reigniting debates over divorce trends in the Christian community and whether Scripture allows divorce.

While a higher proportion of born again Christians marry (84 percent) compared to the national average (78 percent), recent trends indicate that Americans are growing more comfortable with divorce.

"Interviews with young adults suggest that they want their initial marriage to last, but are not particularly optimistic about that possibility," Barna noted. "There is also evidence that many young people are moving toward embracing the idea of serial marriage, in which a person gets married two or three times, seeking a different partner for each phase of their adult life."

Still, the divorce rate among evangelical Christians - who are defined as meeting the born again criteria plus other conditions - was lower (26 percent) than the national average. Meanwhile, those associated with a non-Christian faith were more likely to divorce (38 percent), the study showed.

Other population segments least likely to have been divorced include Catholics (28 percent), Asians (20 percent), adults who graduated from college and whose annual household income is \$75,000 or more (22 percent), and adults who deem themselves to be conservative on social and political matters (28 percent).

Divorce was at a higher rate among Baby Boomers (38 percent), African Americans (36 percent), adults who did not attend college and with lower household income (39 percent), and people who consider themselves to be liberal on social and political matters (37 percent).

Thirty percent of atheists and agnostics had been married and subsequently divorced, but The Barna Group pointed out that they have lower rates of marriage (65 percent) and a higher likelihood of cohabitation.

The study is based on interviews with a random sample of 5,017 adults, age 18 and older, from January 2007 through January 2008. By Audrey Barrick
Christian Post Reporter

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What of the view that when a man or woman becomes a Christian then he or she has a fresh start, and the past marital problems involving divorce are covered by the atonement of Christ? Is it true that that old life was lived in ignorance without the aid of the Spirit or the truth - just as Paul viewed his former persecuting activity as being done "ignorantly in unbelief" (I Tim. 1:13)? Is all that a 'clean slate' in the eyes of God? We need to clarify that tender point. Let us affirm our conviction, that our past sins are fully and freely pardoned through the merits of Christ's blood, but let us add that the earthly consequences of these sins often remain and must be endured. For example,

the thief must restore what he has stolen and be prepared to suffer the punishment due to his crimes; the debtor must pay his debts. It will not do to say, "You once left your wife and children but Calvary covers it all, and so marry whoever you choose in Christ." It is probable that if your former wife has remarried then you may indeed be free to marry. Certainly your conscience is not to be burdened in situations where nothing you can do can make things right. Christians all desire a good conscience, but sometimes we have to endure an uncertainty in these areas, and the best of men will not be united in knowing what most honors God. There are situations which cannot be sorted out on earth. There are marital problems that cannot be undone. Where there is faith and repentance there is forgiveness in Christ and then strength sought from God to bear the earthly consequences of our past follies and cruelties. All this should make us long for the marriage supper of the Lamb and the sight and presence of our eternal Husband, Christ.

We have been speaking about the Christian view of marriage, and to live in this way you need to become partakers of the divine nature. Do you see the problem that is hinted at in this discussion of marriage in the Bible? In the Old Testament this high view of marriage was dashed on the rock of the hardness of men's hearts. Old Testament believers knew that their marriages ought to have been lived out as God had made plain in Genesis one and two, but those people were sinners who loved the world and the things of the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, and so many of them divorced their wives quickly and without any fear of God. Many of the most famous men of the Old Testament were bigamists.

There is a startling change in the New Testament. Elders in a church must be the husbands of one wife. Something has happened to hard hearts. In what the Lord Jesus has come to do, and in what he says in the gospels, there is a cure for a hard heart. The King has come and he can take away hearts of stone and he can replace them with

hearts of flesh, hearts that will love their wives as their own bodies. It is no burden to such a man to be joined to a woman in riches and in poverty, in sickness and in health until death parts them. Christ has poured out his Spirit on the Christian husband and wife; they have the resources of the divine energy. Millions of Christians have found grace to be faithful to their marriage vows, often under great stress. They have found the way not only of survival but of celebration of the one flesh and some have failed.

6 A WORD TO THOSE IN VARIOUS STATES OF MARRIAGE.

Let me say a word to those of you whose marriage is struggling and who are far away from what we have been talking about today. I urge you to confess your sins and rest in the promises of Christ our Covenant. Stop living in unbelief. Believe Him, obey him. Marriage renewal begins with spiritual renewal. The power we need in order to renew our marriages comes first when we understand what marriage is all about and that it was designed by the living God. This God can work by his Holy Spirit in our hearts, and this is where marriage redemption begins, with us entrusting ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now I don't believe that marriage renewal can be picked up in a Damascus Road experience. I don't think that you get it in Holy Spirit baptism. Renewal comes through all the means of grace, as, year after year, the Word and Spirit work effectually in the Christian. Renewal also comes through the influence over us of older Christians who have gone this road before us. We watch them, and we wonder and praise God, and we are encouraged to go on.

Let me say a word to you who are married and who believe in Christ, that you must begin to look at your life partners in the light of the Bible's teaching.

Have you noticed this, in all I have said thus far, I haven't talked much about love? Isn't that strange? Usually, when we talk about marriage, we talk about love first of all. But

that isn't the way the Bible talks about marriage. It talks about the marriage union as something which may be occasioned by love but which, in essence, is something that goes beyond affection. The commitment, the loyalty, the faithfulness, the oneness are so basic and fundamental in marriage that when we do speak of love in marriage, we are practically speaking about loving ourselves. And that's what the apostle said: "He who loves his wife, loves himself."

Life is very short. And it's important that we make as few mistakes as possible during our journey. If you don't want to make a mistake with your marriage, look at it in the light of the Bible and live within it in terms of the way the Bible describes it. Marriage is a great adventure. It presents opportunities for self-fulfillment that are without parallel; no other social arrangement even comes close. It is so awesome that those of us who are happily married can only marvel that we have received this priceless gift. I urge you to think about marriage in biblical terms and to live in the marriage bond the way God wants you to.