

LESSON ESSENTIALS

FAMILY LIFE

LESSON 6: SEPARATION, DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Remembering that marriage is a picture of Christ's commitment to His Church will help us to comprehend the gravity and wonder of the marriage covenant and will help us to fight for our marriages and can uphold the vows we made.

Marriage is taken fairly lightly today in most parts of the world. Marriage vows are too often spoken as empty promises based in a temporary emotion. The Bible has higher expectations than that for Christian marriages, and we ought to be willing to work towards His lofty goal.

A better question that Christians ought to be asking is “How can I live so that divorce never feels like an option?” or “What mindset ought I to have so that I can maintain my marriage vows even in the hardest times?”

“Greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

John 15:13

Do you remember falling in love, or first choosing to love someone? In the eager excitement of a new marriage it might seem inconceivable that we would ever struggle to love our spouse! Yet, in a relationship between two sinful, imperfect people, we ought to expect that some days it will be harder than others to truly demonstrate love to one another.

The world’s perspective on marriage is that you stay together as long as you ‘feel in love’ with each other, as long as it is easy to live together, or as long as it is culturally mandated that you do so. Certainly the Lord has blessed us with an ability to enjoy the emotional aspect of a relationship and that feeling of love is a wonderful gift. However, if our marriage vows – our covenantal promises – are based on feelings alone, then we will find ourselves in a very weak covenant, one that is too easily broken.

Some of the questions surrounding separation, divorce, and remarriage can be as follows: Is it okay for me to separate from my husband because he just doesn’t understand me? When is divorce okay? As a divorced man, can I remarry? However, a better question that Christians ought to be asking is “How can I live so that divorce never feels like an option?” or “What mindset ought I to have so that I can maintain my marriage vows even in the hardest times?”

John 15:13 tells us that great love is akin to laying down your life for the sake of another. While you may never actually have to die to protect your spouse, you will have countless opportunities to live a life of sacrificial love in your marriage, just as Christ did for His bride, the Church. Unfortunately, too often when men and women come to a point in their marriage where they need to ‘lay down their life’ for their spouse, they refuse and instead choose divorce and separation as an escape from the hard work of sacrificial love which is putting another’s needs before our own.

What does sacrificial love look like? It can be small things like being willing to be wronged, being willing to stay silent, being willing to forgive and to forget, or being willing to give in. It can also be big things like refusing to seek physical satisfaction outside of your marriage, refusing to invest emotionally in someone other than your spouse, or refusing to entertain the thoughts of anger and bitterness that would drive you away from your spouse.

When we remember that marriage reflects the sacred bond between Christ and His Church then the thought of divorce and separation seems

much less acceptable. Please hear this: there are certainly Biblically legitimate reasons for divorce and separation, but those are not what we are looking at here. What is of concern is the tendency of the current culture to take the supposed 'easy way out' of a difficult marriage by choosing divorce when things get hard. This is not how Christ deals with His Church.

The scriptures are so clear that He never leaves us or forsakes us, even though we are often very hard to be around. He chooses us, even though we are often so very undesirable. He loves us with an everlasting love, even though we have been unfaithful. When we view ourselves as Christ's unfaithful spouse, it should give us more grace to forgive and to love our spouses when they disappoint us.

For those who have been forced to marry a spouse they did not choose, or for those who have lost the feeling they once had for a partner they did choose, please remember: sacrificial love and faithful devotion to your partner, especially when you lack the emotion to do so, will have an immensely powerful impact on your marriage. To see the steadfast love of another poured out consistently, even when it is not deserved, can have a transforming effect on even the coldest of hearts. You could change the course of your marriage by choosing to stay and to love even when you do not feel like it. In contrast, by walking away from the marriage when things get difficult, you are giving the enemy the victory.

Living in covenant with another imperfect person is not easy. Consistently choosing someone else's good over your own is not easy. But just as Christ endured the cross for the joy set before Him, so we, in our marriages, can endure the difficult seasons when they come for the joy of obedience to the Lord, and for His eternal reward that He will give us for our faithfulness to our marriage covenant.

For those of you who are very happily married just now, and who have not yet hit a difficult patch in your marriage, the thought of separation and divorce may seem so completely unreasonable and undesirable. Praise the Lord for that! But be diligent! Do not take for granted the love and the bond that you have with your spouse right now. Invest in your marriage with sacrificial love and gratitude so that you hopefully never face a difficult time in your marriage.

For those of you who live where marriage is taken lightly, and divorce is common – fight for marriage and the beautiful picture it paints. If you are considering divorce, know that God is broken hearted at the betrayal and

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hurt that come with divorce, and hates what divorce achieves. There are biblical allowances for divorce where an unbelieving spouse refuses to remain married to a believer, and when infidelity occurs and reconciliation or forgiveness is not possible. But seek counseling from Christian mentors, pastors or elders and bring your pain before God. He is able to heal us and fulfill our deepest needs.

I Above all, seek the Lord's will and blessing for your marriage. Ask Him to make both you and your spouse increasingly more like Jesus so that unity can be forged. A long and healthy marriage is a prize worth fighting for, so do not lose heart! Renew your commitment to each other today, and choose love.

IN REVIEW

- Remembering what marriage pictures – Christ and His Church – will help us to take seriously our covenantal vows and to maintain them.
- Remembering that we are so often Christ's unfaithful spouse reminds us to extend the same grace that He has for us to our spouses.
- Sacrificial love is hard work, but it makes an incredible impact in a difficult marriage
- Those in happy marriages now must be diligent to continue fostering that healthy union so that the enemy cannot have an opportunity to destroy that marriage.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- The most important thing you can do for your marriage is to be in a close relationship with the Lord. What can you do to help your relationship to God grow? Pray now, asking the Lord to help you to be more under the influence of His Spirit so that you can love your spouse well.

- Pray for the purity, unity, forgiveness, perseverance, and patience that you and your spouse both need to maintain your marriage vows. How can you pray for your spouse? List some things and commit to pray this week.

- What are some possible threats to your marriage – or what might threaten a future marriage? Consider cultural, professional or familial stresses or influences. How will knowing about these threats help guard against their effects? Pray for God’s help in resisting temptations.

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