

Message #64 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface*

"Divorce Is Not A Sin"

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today's subject is an unusual one, but one that a great many Christians have questions about. The subject for today is, divorce. Divorce is something that is common, not only in the world, but also in Christian circles. The rate of divorce is on the rise, and according to one survey, the divorce rate is higher in the Christian population than in non-Christian groups. But my purpose for discussing divorce today is not to dwell on the sinfulness of this world which culminates in divorce for many people, but rather on the concept of what Christians should do if they have been divorced, or if they are contemplating divorce, or they have been divorced by a spouse and either are remarried, or want to be remarried. It's a quandary for many Christians because of the abundance of incorrect doctrine concerning divorce.

First of all, I want to make a firm statement right up front. This might be hard for some of you, but here goes. "Divorce is not a sin." Let me repeat what I just said, so you won't think you misunderstood me. "Divorce is not a sin." O.K., O.K., I can almost hear the rebuttals. But before you get upset with me, stick around long enough for me to explain what I mean.

First of all, I want you to know that I am in no way attempting to encourage or justify divorce. I'm not suggesting that divorce is good, but only that the act of divorcing is not in itself sinful, but is a separate legal process which takes place as a necessity when sinfulness and mercy has reached a point of impasse. Notice that when two people separate permanently because of differences, the sin that the Bible refers to is not the divorce itself, but hardness of heart. The Bible also refers to

adultery as a sin which contributes to divorce. In the instance of adultery, there is still hardness of heart, but not necessarily on the part of both persons. But in either case, the real sin that has transpired is not the act of divorce itself, but hardness of heart. Now, stick with me for just a little while, and I'll try to unravel this confusion. Certainly confusion reigns in the church today when it is centered around this subject.

Now, I fully realize that this subject is a difficult one, and I also realize that in order to understand what I'm saying, we will have to delve into the scriptures and look much deeper than just the surface in order to comprehend what I'm saying. But, once again I will remind you that this is what our program is all about. We are looking for Scripture Beneath the Surface in order to dispel the confusion that arises by just skimming over the surface. Too many times people try to teach scripture by just skimming the surface, and they make statements which are not completely true, and then build a doctrine on those statements. But when you don't explain scripture completely, confusion reigns. So, let's go to some scriptures and begin to clarify what the Bible really says about divorce.

First of all, let me read Malachi 2:16. It says, "For the LORD, the God of Israel, says that he hates putting away: for one covers violence with his garment, says the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that you deal not treacherously." Now, I don't know if you caught that, but the words, putting away, are the words used in the King James Bible to denote the concept of divorce. In this verse God says that he hates putting away, or in other words, it is saying that God hates divorcing. When it comes to the subject of divorce and remarriage, most of today's doctrine is based on this one single scripture. But what I would like to point out to you is that just about every time this scripture is quoted, it is quoted incorrectly. What most people say when they quote this verse is, "God hates divorce." But that is not what God said. In the verse we just read, Malachi 2:16, God says that he hates to put away. This means he hates to divorce. It's not that God hates divorce itself, but rather, God hates having to divorce.

And no, I'm not splitting hairs. You see, what God is saying in Malachi 2:16 is that he is so dissatisfied with the house of Judah that if Judah does not stop her extreme sinfulness, then God will indeed divorce her. God is saying that divorce is inevitable if they do not repent of their wickedness. Also, in Jeremiah 3:8, we see that God refers to his divorce of the ten tribe nation of Israel, which is referred to as the sister of Judah. Now, think about it. This is a plain example of God himself entering into the action of a divorce. Now, if God himself divorces, then how can anyone say that divorce is a sin? God would not and cannot commit sin. Therefore, the act of divorcing, of itself, is not sin. No, I'm not in any way attempting to suggest that divorce is something good. But both Jeremiah 3:8, and Malachi 2:16, are clearly explaining that God does not like to divorce, but He will do it if it becomes absolutely necessary.

Now, here's another aspect we can look at. Let me ask a question. If you're listening to this message, think about how you would answer it. Here's my question. "Would God give permission to sin?" Think about it. "Would God give someone permission to sin, to commit something that was sinful?" The answer is plainly simple. There is no possibility under heaven that God would ever give someone permission to sin. God doesn't deal in wickedness. God does not give permission to commit sin.

So now, think about this. In the Old Testament, under the Law of Moses, the children of Israel were permitted to give a writing of divorcement. It is clear that this permission was not because of righteousness, but was because of the hardness of their hearts. The sin that was committed by the children of Israel was hardness of heart. Divorce, the putting away of the wife or the husband, was not the sin. However, it was the last option to a problem of hardness of heart. It was a solution for that which had not been overcome by mercy and love. The sin that had been committed was not divorce, but hardness of heart.

Now, we know that Moses did not make up his own laws. We know that everything that Moses gave the children of Israel was from God. God did not approve of the hardness of heart, nor of the adultery which a man or woman might commit. It is very plain that the adultery or hardness of heart was an unrighteous thing. But the divorce, the putting away of a spouse, was a solution which gave men and women an opportunity to start over without having to first become perfect in the flesh.

God gave permission for man to divorce because men and women are human. God knows that we are frail. Our human frame is not strong enough to overcome all wickedness. God knew that hardness of heart could not always be overcome because our flesh is too strong. The solution of divorce, because of the hardness of heart or adultery by one or both parties in a marriage, was not intended as a justification for sin, but rather as an opportunity to free the injured party from the bondage to the other person. It provided an opportunity to start over again when we have been overcome by sin, or when we are in danger of being emotionally destroyed by the other person. Yes, we should be sinless, and we should not commit adultery or have hardness of heart. But God also provides a way of escape when we are unable to demonstrate a perfect heart. Think about it. If you were locked in a marriage where the spouse was extremely evil or adulterous, what would you do? We see what God did when Israel was evil and adulterous. The Bible clearly refers to God entering into the act of divorcing Israel because of her hardness of heart and her adulterous ways. Not only would God permit a man to divorce his wife, but God would also enter into the act of divorce himself. So you see, anyone who calls divorce a sin, is in danger of calling God a sinner too, just because he divorced Israel. If divorce is a sin, then God sinned when he divorced wicked Israel.

Now, God did not sin when he divorced Israel, nor did he sin when he threatened to divorce her wicked sister Judah. And when he gave permission for humans to enter into divorce, he was not giving us permission to sin either. You see, divorce is not a sin. That's not the sin. The sin isn't divorce itself, but is the adultery or hardness of heart that leads to the divorce in the first place. When the sin of hardness of heart, or the sin of adultery, which is an action which stems from hardness of heart, continues without end, then in order to prevent destruction to the souls of one or both of the marriage partners, divorce is necessary. Even God himself has explained that there is a time when he will no longer put up with sin. When those who are supposed to be the bride of Christ continually have hardness of heart toward him and continue their adulterous acts to the point where they cannot be redeemed, God will separate these wicked people from him. For God, the adulterous acts which end in complete rejection to him, would be equivalent to the unforgivable sin; blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. And God will not forgive that.

Now think of this. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is equivalent to the concept of being married to God, in the sense that you have come to be one with God, therefore knowing him intimately, then rejecting him in order that you might be married to Satan. God says that he will not forgive us if we blaspheme the Holy Spirit. To blaspheme means to speak evil of. It doesn't mean that the unforgivable sin is to speak evil of the Father or the Son, but rather to speak evil of the Holy Spirit. The reason for this is because you can only speak evil of the Holy Spirit after you have come to know who the Holy Spirit is. Yes, you can speak evil of anything, but God will not hold you responsible for speaking evil of something for which you have no true knowledge, but only for that which you do have knowledge. Once you have come to know God by his spirit, then you truly do know him. Up until that point you don't really know him, even though you might think you do. But once you truly do know God by his Holy Spirit, and then if you reject him completely, then God will judge that you were not committing a sin of ignorance, but that you knew what you were doing, and he will then reject you forever.

At this time, God has divorced you. He has put you away. He has cast you out of his house because you have determined to go your own way and would not repent of it. He knows that if you would repent of your actions, then there was some redeeming value in your heart. But he knows that if you are determined to continue in your adulterous ways, and that you have surely rejected him and feel no sorrow of heart, then your heart is hard, and there is no hope for you.

Now, put yourself in the perspective of a human marriage. If either or both of the marriage partners have come to the place where there is no repentance for their actions, then this solution is also the same for them as it is for God. Whether it is for the reason of adultery on the part of one of the marriage partners, or if it is hardness of heart in one or both, then the only solution is to separate one from another. The real sin is the hardness of heart. When a heart has become like stone and the person will not turn away from their sinful thoughts and actions nor their hard speech, and if this situation is unredeemable because one or both parties will not repent and humble themselves, then the marriage cannot be saved. Divorce is the only remaining solution to the sin that has been committed. Now, notice that divorce takes place only after the sin has continued to the point that there is no sorrow or turning back on the part of the person who has lost their love for their spouse. Divorce is not the sin. The sin is hardness of heart. Just as God hates divorcing, and would much rather that we would repent from our own hardness of heart, God would also desire that we would be merciful and explore every opportunity to save the marriage.

God would also desire that when we are the cause of the marriage difficulty, even if we are only partially the cause, we should repent of our hard words and actions. But just as wicked Israel would not repent of their hardhearted attitude toward God, marriage partners of today do the same thing. They begin to grow cold toward their first love and begin to look for other lovers. No, it is not always sexual adultery that takes place in a marriage, but it is always hardness of heart that makes them act in a manner which is impure.

Now, consider this. There are many people who have experienced divorce, yet are Christians. But the divorce doctrine which permeates the church today incorrectly accuses any divorced

person who has been remarried of continually sinning. Certainly, if it was divorce itself that was the sin, this might be considered true because you can't undo a divorce. But what you can repent of is the hardness of heart that you had which led up to the divorce. But God always makes a way for his people to repent from their sin. In the case of divorce it is not the divorce that is the sin, it is the hardness of heart that caused the divorce that is the sin.

If you are a person who has experienced a divorce, and if you recognize that you were part of the problem that caused the divorce, then the sin that you need to repent of is hardness of heart that continued without remorse until such time as it caused, or helped to cause, the permanent destruction of your marriage. You cannot repent of a legal document. A divorce is a legal contract entered into in written form. It is not a heart thing at all. You can only repent for things of the heart. If you helped to cause a divorce between you and your spouse, then the only thing you can repent of is that you had hardness of heart and would not turn from it. Many people are told that they have committed the unpardonable sin by getting a divorce. But the real unpardonable sin is not the divorce itself, but the hardness of heart. Hardness of heart is not an unpardonable sin. You can't repent of a divorce. It's a legal document, not a sin. No matter how many legal documents you create to erase a divorce, there is no way to say that you never entered into that legal agreement to separate permanently. However, what you can repent of, what you can turn away from, is your hardness of heart that you had which caused the divorce in the first place.

So many people feel eternally condemned because they think they cannot ever fix the problem of having entered into divorce. They feel remorse continually because they are told, erroneously, that God hates divorce. And because they have been divorced, they think God hates them because they cannot fix the problem. But God allows divorce as a solution to bring life when we humans have gone down a one-way street and can find no way out. If we were a righteous people we would just be righteous and fix every situation. But we are not a righteous people, for we are caught in these bodies of flesh. And no matter how hard we try, we always end up failing time after time after time. God knows our frame. He knows we are weak in the flesh. He has not given us divorce as a solution to being happy go lucky, but rather as an alternative to being beat to death unendingly by Satan's accusations. Interestingly enough, it is God who forgives everything except the unpardonable sin, but when it comes to the church, the church people want to beat a divorced person to death. However, at the bottom line, Divorce is a legal document that describes the circumstances surrounding the actual sin of hardness of heart. It is hardness of heart that is the sin, and God forgives sin when we repent of it.

No person should justify themselves in divorce, but should search their hearts for mercy toward their spouse. However, when we have failed in righteousness to the point where we have made a mess of our lives, and have destroyed our marriage contract, then we need not condemn ourselves for the rest of our lives. And even if we have remarried, we can still repent of our sin. We can still repent that in our former marriage that we demonstrated hardness of heart and did not turn from it. God forgives us when we repent of our sin. It is not the dissolving of legal contracts that God forgives. These are only the necessary solutions that even God himself will enter into if there is absolutely no other solution. Of course, we know that in God's case, a divorce is not caused by

both parties. It is not hardness of heart on God's part when he divorces, but on the part of us humans. However, in the case of man and wife of humans, it is very seldom just one partner who is responsible for hardness of heart. Even when adultery of one partner has taken place, there is every reason to suspect that the other partner has not been loving and merciful as much as they should be, either.

If you are suffering from remorse because you have divorced and remarried, and you feel that God cannot forgive you, then you must realize that God forgives the sin, and you must also realize that the sin he wants to forgive you for is your hardness of heart. If you have repented for having such a hard heart in your former marriage, then God has forgiven you. God can never forgive you for the actual legal contract of a divorce because the divorce itself is not the sin, only the consequence of your sin. Consequences always follow sin. We may suffer the consequences of social and emotional situations brought upon by divorce, but we can always rejoice in God's mercy, in that he will forgive us for the hardness of heart that we displayed in that former marriage. No, we can never fully escape the sorrow which comes from a broken marriage, but we can escape the guilt of hardness of heart. We escape the guilt of hardness of heart by first recognizing that our heart was hard, and then turning away from that hardness. When we go to God through Jesus Christ and ask him to forgive us for the sin we committed of being uncaring, unloving, and unmerciful, then he will forgive us. He will never take away the fact of what that sin caused, for then we would become headstrong and even more wicked. We must suffer the consequences for our hardness of heart, but we can still find relief from the guilt that is a result of our spiteful words and actions.

And one last thing. If God had not allowed a writing of divorce, then his children would never have found mercy in his sight. Mercy does not mean that God looks upon you as having done something right, but means that he looked upon you when you did something wrong and still found a way to help you out of the mess you have made. God would rather that we never enter into sin, for he knows how it hurts us. But he makes the way for us to escape when our hearts become hardened for a time and have caused permanent damage to ourselves and others. No, you cannot escape the responsibility and the sorrow that comes with a divorce, but you can be forgiven for the sin of hardness of heart that caused it, and through Jesus Christ you can begin the healing process of the hurt that accompanies it.