

Everything You Should Know Before You Get A Divorce

by Keith Green

An Introduction –

This article has been a long time coming. Just about every day we get letters asking us to tackle this subject. On several occasions we have planned to do a whole issue on it, but each time we began, we realized that the subjects and Scriptures involved were so heavily debated and interpretations so varied, that we would just be stirring up a hornets' nest to put "our" position in print. So we kept putting it off.

But as time has passed, we have become acutely aware of this tragic problem growing in the Church. First of all, my wife and I have many personal friends whose marriages have "fallen apart" during the past few years. These include many well-known Christian musicians and ministers. This has cut Melody and me to the heart as we have watched marriage after marriage disintegrate, hearing one excuse after the other why "we just couldn't live together anymore..." Then we have watched while many of these people quickly got remarried, saying to us, "Oh, **now** I am **really** happy! God has really worked all this out...Maybe it was His will all along!" Meanwhile somewhere, the former husband or wife is still aching, bleeding inside, and wondering, "What happened? Where do I stand now?" And then comes the guilt and torment.

We have also received letters from many wives and husbands begging us for help and advice on what to do. They paint the saddest pictures of fights and mistrust, broken promises, and worst of all--scared children who are innocently caught in the crossfire.

This article is not going to answer all your theological questions concerning divorce or remarriage: "Is it okay to do this?" "Am I allowed to do that?" "What if I'm already remarried?" These questions are among some of the hardest in scriptural study--and have been the cause of no end of debate among Bible scholars. The reason is because the Bible seems to be unclear in many of these areas. Of course "we" have an opinion on all of them (and so does every church on the block!), but we do not want to print merely opinion, we want to share rock-solid truth--ABSOLUTE truth! That is why this article is called "Everything You Should Know **Before** You Get A Divorce."

We know that God clearly said, "**I hate divorce!**" (Mal. 2:16) And so we want to reach you **before** you make that fatal mistake. That is the best time to deal with sin--BEFORE it occurs. Sure God has made provision for repentance and healing, but the "who can's" and "why's" involved in divorce and remarriage are so heavily debated in Church circles, we just want to stay out of the fray. (Please **don't** write us and tell us what **you** think God will let you do; or "such and such a person can get a divorce and still be right with God.") Frankly, the purpose of this article is not to deal with all the "what if's." We are interested in saving the marriages (and families) that are still able to be saved.

Just as Melody's articles on abortion have been responsible for saving little human lives, we are praying that this article will save the family-lives of many homes, so that many little ones will be protected from the anguish of being brought up by separated parents--completely contrary to God's expressed plan for the family in the Bible. It is never our purpose to "wrangle about words" (II Tim. 2:14), for "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (II Cor. 3:6) We want to spread the Spirit of Christ, who "came so you might have life, and have it more abundantly!" (John 10:10) It is **this** "life," full of victorious battles and overcome trials, that we aim to share in this article. – Keith

Marriage -- Passion Or Patience?

Some time ago I received a phone call from a very sad brother who had been trying to get ahold of me by phone for many days. He shared that his wife was about to leave him, and she wouldn't listen to him or

their pastor, and just didn't want to talk about it anymore. He said that the reason he was calling me was that she really liked our Newsletter and had a lot of respect for me and our ministry. He felt sure-that if I was willing, she would talk to me and maybe listen to reason. I told him that I would be glad to try to share with her. So he left the phone, and in a few moments she was there on the other end, sort of giggling nervously.

I said, "I here you wanna go and get a divorce and end your marriage."Yeah," she said.

I said, "Why?"

She said, "Because I just don't love him anymore...anyway, even if we get divorced, I can still serve the Lord, and so can he."

"Well," I said, "concerning 'love,' the Bible says wives should **love** their husbands. It doesn't say you should '**feel**' love, it says you should **LOVE!** Love isn't a feeling, it isn't 'romance.'It's an action based on commitment. In fact, it **is** COMMITMENT!"

There was silence on the other end for a few seconds. Then she said, "No one ever told me that before. I thought that if I didn't FEEL love toward my husband, then what's the use of trying to 'act' lovingly. What's the use of pretending there's hope for our marriage when I didn't 'love' him anymore?"

"I understand," I said. "The world has perverted the concept of love so badly that people go from one relationship to another, one marriage to another, simply because the 'love' feelings are gone. The simple truth is that those feelings were never 'love' in the first place! They were merely 'romantic emotions' that come and go with the wind. They're based on moods and circumstances, but mostly on the excitement and mystique of a 'new' relationship. As soon as the 'newness' wears off, you find yourself sitting across the dinner table from just another human being--and **that's** when the challenge begins. You've made a bunch of promises--and a commitment to love and live together 'til death do us part,'--and now you'd better find out what this word 'love' really means, or there's just no hope for your marriage!"

Just then another long-distance call came in on another line and I had to go, so I prayed with that women, right there on the phone. In the prayer I asked God to "burn these principles into her mind," so that wherever she turned, all she could see would be God's commandment to "love your husband!"

Well God's power truly fell on us during that prayer! This couple later visited with us and shared that God really healed their marriage. This woman reported that within one half hour after our phone call, she was weeping and praying with her husband. She said that I had asked God to "burn" my words into her mind, and that's **exactly what He did!** She shared that she had never understood before that love was not a feeling or an option, but a **commandment**--an action and a choice to keep the commitment she had made to her husband and God that she would **always love him**. How free she seemed! She was no longer a slave to her "non-loving" feelings; she now understood that love was something that God had not only commanded her to do, but had **enabled** her to do. **And the feelings came after the obedience!** She said that whenever she did the loving thing, she really FELT love for her husband. How grateful Melody and I were as we saw their tears and praise to God. And as their two little girls played at our feet, we had more cause to rejoice that God had spared these little ones by keeping their daddy and mommy from destroying the family they had.

The Children

How many times have you heard this: "They're just staying together for the children." I remember the first time I heard that. I wasn't a Christian at the time, and I thought, "What a drag! How can they keep a miserable relationship together just for the kids?" Well, my wife and I now have three little precious ones of our own to bring up in the love and fear of the Lord. I now can see the reasoning of these tormented

parents. They might not be able to stand each other, but they both love their children so much that they wouldn't dream of forcing them to relate to two different parents living in two different homes.

In our current "liberated" society, fewer and fewer people have unselfish standards. And unfortunately, this "me first" attitude is spilling over into the Church. Instead of couples having a primary concern for their children, they reason, "If **I'm** not happy, what's the use in keeping my children happy?" "Why, it would be better for the children to live without all this arguing..." More times than not, many of those involved in divorce came from broken homes themselves, and they have promised themselves, "I'll never do that to **my** kids!" And this only adds to the guilt and condemnation later if they get a divorce.

I am not suggesting that couples stay together merely because they have children. This, in itself, is not enough of a reason to keep a shaky marriage together. Many people avoid dealing with the **real** problems in their marriages by using the "children" excuse as the "only" reason to stay together. Then they just continue despising each other in their hearts, and things grow worse. What I want to deal with now are some rules that will help you avoid ever having to deal with this question--"Should we get a divorce or stick it out?"--by replacing it with this question--"What can we do to overcome the problems we're having in our marriage, so we can make a loving home for our family, and glorify God?"

Never Say "DIVORCE!";

Awhile back I was talking with my neighbor David Wilkerson, and he shared with me his burden for all the marriages that were breaking up in the Church. He told me of ministers and church leaders he knew who were throwing in the towel. Then he said something that really hit home. " You know, Keith, God has shown me a principle that would really save a lot of marriages from ending up in divorce. Words are powerful things, and I believe that Christians should be taught that there is **one** word they should avoid at all costs: **Divorce!**"

I can remember when Melody and I first got married, even though we weren't yet Christians, I always said that I never would consider divorce as an option. That way I would always be forced to work through any problem. When Mr. Wilkerson shared his principle with me, I knew it was the truth. "The tongue is a restless evil, full of deadly poison." (James 3:8) I believe that married couples should consider "divorce" the dirtiest word in the English language. It should **never** be used. (Better yet, it should never be considered as even a remote possibility!) You wouldn't consider murdering your own child if he was uncontrollable, would you? You would try to work it all out. Oh, things would be trying and difficult, and you might lose your temper, but you would never consider killing him! That's exactly what divorce is--the murder of a marriage and a family. And talking divorce is **talking murder!** Thinking divorce is **thinking murder!** That's the only way to consider it. You must never, NEVER use that word as a weapon in an argument. And if you've already been using it, STOP now! If you have your eye on the door, you'll never be able to straighten things out. The sooner you stop thinking and talking divorce, the sooner an atmosphere of love and trust will begin to form between you and your mate.

Other Things You Shouldn't Say

One of the most destructive things you can say to your husband or wife is, "Bill doesn't do things like that..." or, "Connie keeps **her** house looking **real** nice! " Whatever you do, don't compare your wife or husband to others to make a point. God didn't give you to Bill, He gave you to **your** husband, so you'd better start being grateful and quit looking at and talking about the "greener grass" at Bill's house. And God didn't allow you to marry Connie, so quit using her as an example to make your wife look like a total slob. You must begin by accepting each other the way each of you are, and then work from there in love and patience. Pointing to other people's supposed lack of problems will only hurt. Deal **directly with the problem itself** without bringing **anyone** or **anything** else into it.

But I Married The Wrong Person!

That might be **very** true! It's extremely possible that you went ahead and married the first person you "fell in love with." Or maybe you got married because you felt insecure and were thrilled that somebody actually wanted **you!** Whatever your story is, if you got married for any other reason than obedience to God, to glorify Him, it's more than likely you married the **wrong** person (or at least the right person at the **wrong** time--for all the **wrong** reasons).

Now before you breathe a sigh of relief and call your lawyer, hold on a minute. Even though you might have made your marriage commitment to the wrong person, even for completely selfish reasons, **it is STILL a commitment**, and God wants you to honor it!

"When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not keep it. Do not let your speech cause you to sin, and do not say in the presence of God that 'it was a mistake.' Why should God be angry on account of your words and destroy the work of your hands? (Ecc. 5:4-6)

Even though it may **be** true that you got married completely out of God's will, you must realize that it is **now** God's will for you to admit your mistake, ask His forgiveness, and then by His grace, make your present marriage A **GODLY ONE!** Don't think it's okay to get a divorce by using that quasi-religious excuse: "Well, **NOW** I'm going to obey God and just 'unmarry' the one He didn't want me to marry in the first place!" It might sound like a "spiritual" reason to you, but very few people are going to believe you're getting a divorce to "please God"--especially you! (Not to mention God.)

There is a wonderful promise in Romans: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those that love God, to those who are called according to **His** purpose." (Rom. 8:28) How many things? **ALL THINGS!** That's right, even our mistakes, our blunders, our downright stupid errors! God is in the business of taking garbage and making it into jewels--look at Peter (whom the Lord had to rebuke so harshly--Mark 8:32-33), look at David (and his adultery with Bathsheba--who later became the mother of Solomon--the next king of Israel!), and look at **YOU!** Why, if God couldn't take someone's miserable, mistake-filled life and turn it around for blessing and growth, hardly anyone would go to heaven!

The Purpose Of Marriage

When Melody and I first became Christians, we had been married about a year and a half. We began going to a church that had quite a lot of teaching on marriage and the family. We were grateful for this, because we had had quite a few fights during our first year together. One of the things our pastor shared has stuck with us through it all.

He began his marriage series by telling us what God's purpose for a Christian husband was: **To make his wife a success in the Kingdom of God!** And the purpose of the wife? You guessed it: **To make her husband a success in the Kingdom of God!** But what does this mean? Does it mean making sure your husband makes a lot of money, or gets a promotion at work? Not at all. It means that our main function in marriage is to be praying for, encouraging, counseling, and correcting each other in love, so that our mate will fully please God in all they do. This is one of the most exciting teachings about marriage I have heard! After all, love means to serve others for their good. We should have as our goal to make our husband or wife the best Christian possible--in prayer, in ministry, in attitude, in service, in giving, and especially, **in loving!** If you truly make this your goal, you will have no time for the selfish attitudes that have caused all the arguments you've ever had.

The Scriptures are full of riches on this subject. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of

water with the Word, that He might present to Himself the Church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless." (Eph. 5:25-27)

This Scripture shows us that the husband should take the lead in all spiritual things as the head and priest of the household. There should be a daily time of prayer and reading of Scriptures together (as well as a time with the whole family if you have children). No couple can fight and stay bitter long, where there is a deep and sincere time of prayer together. (And beware--when you find you **can't or don't want to** pray, the enemy has got a strangle-hold on your relationship --true prayer is the surest way to loosen it!)

But for you wives who now are going to bring out the excuse that your husband is not the spiritual leader he should be, and **that** is why you feel there is no hope for your marriage, the Bible has some medicine for you as well...

"In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that **even if any of them are disobedient to the Word**, they may be won **without a word** by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior." (I Pet. 3:1-2)

Ah, the balance of the Word of God!

Finally...Love, Love And Love Again!

I cannot stress enough the principle that I shared with that woman on the phone who was convinced that divorce was the only answer because she didn't "love her husband anymore. " Don't fall for that trap! Love is not a feeling, it's a **commitment**. I pray that God will burn this truth into your mind the same way He burned it into hers. (That's what God means when He says, "I will write my laws upon their hearts"--Jer. 31:33. He wants our conscience always to be "bearing witness to the truth"--Rom. 2:15.)

Remember, God will not do your loving for you--YOU must love your husband or wife. That means choosing to do what's best for **them**. It means **not** waiting for the right "feelings," but doing the right and loving thing NOW--don't worry, the right feelings will **always** follow the right action. Your marriage, your family, the body of Christ, and the cause of the Gospel depend upon you making the CHOICE to love--in all that you do.

"For love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things...let all that you do be done in love." (I Cor. 13:7; 16:14)

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Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom." Proverbs 13:10