

## Stay Married!

I have been asked to come to Germany to speak at a couples' seminar geared for army personnel going to and coming from Iraq. Steve Myers is my point man in Europe for this meeting. Pastor Mickey Robinson, who pastors just outside the gate of Fort Hood, which deploys thousands to Iraq and Brother Myers have updated me to this fact: U. S. Army families are in trouble! In 2004, ten thousand army families have broken up in divorce; by the way, that is not the count of individuals - those are whole families! The statistics reflect an emotional pandemic outbreak.

Families in trouble cannot be isolated to our fellow Americans who are in uniform, but also to the average man and woman on the street. I am crestfallen to admit that far too many Bible teachers and ministers are doing more than blink the eye at divorce; they are pushing it. On this point, the membership of Christchurch know I have not softened on my deep-seated conviction - that marriage is for life and we shall do everything in our power in this local church to promote and preserve God's holy covenant. A question was given to our Lord and His answer is a clarion call to return, in the Christian ideal, to the original plan for marriage: *"They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so"* (Matthew 19:7, 8). Our Lord clearly points out that divorce is an answer, by civil law, to those who operate with hardness of hearts. You cannot make it say anything other than what is plainly said. Jesus then raises the standard back to the "default program," when He said, *"...but from the beginning it was not so."* Allow me to take sides with God as we give you four basic concepts to keep in mind that will help you stay married.

### **1. Stay married because God wants you to stay married.**

On this, all who are open minded to Scripture cannot argue. *"Marriage is honourable in all..."* (Hebrews 13:4). God includes all, so it is not wise to put your legal union down as not valid, not as good as it should be, or, in your opinion, not God's original intent. When you said "I do" at the altar, made your vow, and consummated the union, it became God's will. Jesus, taking the words from the Old Covenant and reminding us of their validity said, *"And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"* (Matthew 19:5, 6). Man is not permitted to put asunder those whom God has joined together. This teaching is constant throughout Scripture: *"And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously"* (Malachi 2:15, 16). Make no mistake; God did not start loving divorce because of the permissiveness of our age! If we stopped right here, that would be enough reason, but we have a few more thoughts:

### **II. Stay married because you promised.**

No one made you vow unto God to stay faithful until parted by death; you promised this on your own accord. Now honor it! *"Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?"* (Ecclesiastes 5:5, 6). No marriage is safe that considers divorce as an option. When there is crisis in a home, the reconciliation is half way done when the couple comes to a counselor saying, we may be having trouble, but we are committed to keeping this together rather than saying, if things don't change, I'm divorcing. Frankly, I hesitate to continue counseling a couple that is not willing to commit, no matter what. Too many times

we get stranded in circular reasoning, rehashing history and attempts to resurrect and beat dead horses. You cannot go beyond your problems unless you are first going to keep your vow! Is it any wonder that the children of this generation have a problem with honesty when they see Mom and Dad not keeping their word in marriage? We let ourselves off the hook too easily by saying, well, the spouse did not keep his or her word, so I am off the hook. It would almost be humorous if it were not so sad to see the attempts of trying to make Scripture say something that it does not say, to give the disobedient "permission" to violate the covenant of marriage.

### **III. Stay married because of the kids.**

Some have argued that it is better on the kids to divorce. Really? Have you studied the kids ten years later? In thirty-five years of marriage counseling, I have never talked to a devout, grown Christian that ever once said it was good that Mom and Dad divorced. Mind you, there are times when it may be dangerous for one to stay under the roof with a parent that is criminal or insane, but keep in mind; this is where the grace of God can change things. Don't give up on what God can do. Do you believe God can physically heal? Do you believe He can and will answer prayer? Believe and pray. And pray in such a way that you wait on God. *"Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee"* (Proverbs 20:22). Although contextually, the reference is on a different subject, the principle is the same: *"And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea"* (Mark 9:42).

For those who ask, won't having an unspiritual or lost parent take our children away from God? Listen to the Word of God: *"And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy"* (I Corinthians 7:13, 14). According to the Word of God, the child can be protected in sanctifying grace which means setting apart the child from the wicked influence of the unbelieving. Some of the greatest servants of God I have ever known had one of their parents live wickedly, while the other lived holy. And the great thing is that the unholy parent did not undo the child rearing of the believing parent. This was the case of the man who pastored the largest Sunday School in America in the last half of the twentieth century. His father lived and died a drunk and immoral. His mother never divorced him. His mother's holiness more than compensated, thus fulfilling the Word of God. I need to say parenthetically, under certain conditions, it may not be expedient to live as married people, especially in the matters of S.T.D. complications. But again, God's grace can heal or give another route that does not include re-marriage as the human anecdote.

I know it would be good if we had some better reason other than the harm it will do the children, but it will do until someone buries their own selfish desire to have their own way and loves their spouse for all the right reasons.

### **IV. Stay married because, as a rule, your problems will pass.**

Divorce and remarriage is often a permanent (and wrong) answer to a temporary problem. How very sad to talk with people who seem aghast that the same marriage they "escaped" from has duplicated the problems and sometimes even to a worse level.

The passing of time and aging process can really help a hurting marriage. Aren't there some things you see differently as a forty-year-old that you did not see as a thirty-year-old? Trust me on this! This is true in a marriage. Things that don't matter, things that do matter, and even your ability to develop a sense of humor can alter your compatibility. As I think back over the years to marriages that I consider great, I don't recall any that were under fifteen years. In all honesty, I thought we had a great marriage for the

first fifteen years. Compared to the next fifteen years, I would categorize it very good and above average, but as Barbara and I look forward to celebrating thirty-two years of marriage, I can now say, it is great! If you were to ask me what the key is, I would say, we need patience! Don't allow hardships to destroy the potential of a truly great marriage. *"For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise"* (Hebrews 10:36).

- Pastor Pope -

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