

## **MARRIAGE...TO BE OR NOT TO BE...**

Texts: Hebrews 13:4; Malachi 2:11-17

“To be, or not to be, that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take Arms against a Sea of troubles,”

These are the opening lines of a soliloquy spoken by Prince Hamlet in Shakespeare's Hamlet, Act III, Scene I. Here we observe the young prince lamenting the pain and unfairness of life but acknowledging that the alternative of taking matters into his own hands might be making things worse.

It is well known that half of the marriages in our country are expected to end up in divorce. Even the secular world is wondering have we made a mistake in being complacent about this most serious conversation. Diane Medved, PhD, said, “In my private practice as a marriage counselor and psychologist, I've helped plenty of struggling couples through separation and “liberation.” I originally thought that staying together in turmoil was more traumatic than making the break, that striking down taboos about divorce was part of modern enlightenment. I was wrong. As I shifted my professional focus to divorced individuals, the truth was difficult to avoid: treating divorce as “morally neutral” – an option no better or worse than staying married – was irreparably damaging to the very people I wanted to help.

Often in tears, the divorced people I talked with described fantasies of an ex-spouse returning or confessed guilt over abandoning a devoted mate. They spoke of being uprooted from their homes, of splitting possessions, of children changed from innocents to confidants or scapegoats. And they mourned a part of their lives never to be recaptured – the family unit now destroyed. I'd ask, “Looking back, do you think you could have made it work?” Women would respond, “He was not romantic. He thought only of himself and his career.” Men might say, “She took all my money, and then wouldn't trust me when I was away overnight.” But each side would then conclude, “Knowing what I know now, yes, we could have made it work.” Mrs. Medved said these words in 1989. Now 18 years later she not only has not abandoned her position, she has written a book entitled, Don't Divorce: Powerful Arguments for Saving and Revitalizing Your Marriage. Mind you, this was not the opinion of an old fashioned preacher; this is a voice from the world saying throwaway marriages are not the answer.

As many today are contemplating maintaining the permanency of their own marriage or embracing the alternative by allowing it to dissolve, I ask you to please consider the following thoughts.

I. We need to return to biblical thinking about marriage.

God's ideal is to stay married. Jesus was asked about divorce, and in Matthew 19:8, "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." Our Lord looked at marriage as more than something God instituted, but He has ordained it to be lasting. Christ declared in Mark 10:7-8, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

II. We need to be spiritually minded, not culturally driven.

In Romans 8:6, the Bible warns us, "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." A simple Greek definition of "carnal" is "human nature with its frailties." In other words our response to everything we face in life from the Christian worldview should never be motivated by the carnal, but rather the spiritual mindset. Herein is "life and peace" (Romans 8:6b).

In our culture today divorce has lost its stigma. It is no longer considered a disgrace to divorce, but is actually admired and promoted. This shifting paradigm is reflected in the high office of our land, the presidency. John F. Kennedy was an immoral man. During his lifetime, this truth was not reported, although many, even in the press observed his wicked adulterous lifestyle. Mrs. Kennedy did not leave him and it went unreported for the simple reason it was unacceptable. It grieves me to write these words about a man that was so highly respected in my youth. There were some reports that President Kennedy was leaning toward an evangelical embrace of the Gospel before he was assassinated, but his conversion has not been documented. A few years ago the former president, Bill Clinton was questioned about AIDS prevention by adhering to the principle of sexual total abstinence. In his answer, he, like many others, did not speak out directly against abstinence but he did refer to the person who pushed for abstinence alone for the prevention method as "a loser." Then the former president proceeded to say we must consider the culture. Dr. Peter Jones in his remarkable book, *Spirit Wars, Pagan Revival in Christian America* wrote, "On November 3, 1992 the people of the United States voted into the most powerful position on earth a president who had smoked pot, dodged the draft, and espoused the sexual morals of the hippie revolution. The anti-establishment, flower power children of the Sixties entered the halls of political power in the nineties. Politics will never be the same again. Hippies, now with short hair and three piece suits, squat in the White House – legally. In the

nineties, the world witnessed 'The Second Coming of the 60's,' and President Clinton, he who had breathed that (60's) era's heady atmosphere, and inhaled deeply,' became, in his capacity as social head of the nation, a metaphor for our times."

It was not until our 40<sup>th</sup> president, Ronald Reagan was elected that we had now elected our first divorced president. President Obama looked at marriage as optional concerning the gender of those involved and actually promoted along with the consensus of his wife the union of same sex union, thus attacking the very moral fiber of the God-ordained institution. Our present president, Donald J. Trump is married to his third wife. Politically liberal or conservative, the stigma is gone. This is not to say that President Regan did not despise the divorce he went through, or that President Trump has not regretted his failed marriages; I am simply making the point, in our changed culture, divorce is not a disgrace.

III. We need to view marriage as a covenant, not a contract.

We live in a day in which we are surrounded by contracts. Our house mortgages, our leases, our car notes and the ubiquitous cell phone. All of these include a deal. If we pay so much, we can expect so much house, car or data for our purchase and plan. And in every contract there is provision for default. In other words, if something doesn't work we can get out of the contract. Marriage is not, nor was it ever considered by God (and should not be by you and me) as a contract; it is a covenant which is declared in the statement, "for better or for worse," until death alone parts us. We are not talking about a "deal," we are talking about a promise, a holy vow made not only to each other, but to God Almighty (Ecclesiastes 5:4).

"Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. 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" (Malachi 2:14, 15).

Do away with statements that gender a toxic belief system and exchange them for statements that encourage covenant keeping such as, exchange "we've grown apart" for "we'll grow together." Instead of saying, "my needs are not being met" to "with God's help, I'll meet the needs of my spouse." Don't say, "There's no future in us" declare "we are one flesh, inseparable!" Take "I've got to go on with my life (meaning apart from your spouse)", and say instead, "I'm not going unless you go with me, 'whither thou goest, I will go'" (Ruth 1:16,17).

We live in a world that says, "Follow your heart." My advice? Do your duty, until your heart catches up. Jeremiah 17:9 reminds us, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Wisdom tells us in Proverbs

4:23, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." God's plan is that marriage is for keeps. Agree with God and stay in His will.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.