

“For Richer Or Poorer”

Introduction. The words are easily recognizable, and equally understandable, but are they the truth? With these and other words, we promise undying love, endless devotion, and unquestionable loyalty and faithfulness “until death do us part,” and then divorce the mate with whom we stood before God, family, and friends to make this promise. Why? More importantly, what can be done to overcome them?

I. Four Attitudes Of Divorce

A. “We just fell out of love.”

1. The kind of love on which biblical marriage is based is not one into which one falls. We may “fall into” lust or infatuation, but not biblical love. True biblical love establishes a value instead of seeking a value. Think about the following statement: “I love him/her because of the way he/she makes me feel.” Or, “I love him/her because of what he/she does for me.” Both of these statements represent selfish motives for what is thought to be “love.”
2. But biblical love, the kind on which marriage is supposed to be founded, is selfless. It says, “This person is valuable to me because I love them.”
 - a) God’s love for us established rather than required a value (Romans 5:8). When marriage is based on true biblical love rather than selfish desires, it can and will endure the inevitable changes of time and remain fortified.
 - b) We think we “fall out of love” when those selfish values that we mistook for “love” fail or change. The truth is that what we thought was “love” was actually only “lust” (selfish desire).
 - c) True love builds along an appropriate path, from a spiritual base and then on to an emotional level, finishing with a physical level once a couple is married (Hebrews 13:4).

B. “We grew apart.”

1. Though not a scriptural justification for divorce (cp. Matthew 19:3-9), this one is often accurate. Couples who do not work at “growing together” will usually “grow apart.” But should we be surprised that we “grow apart” when we have separate friends, interests, religions, hobbies, bank accounts, relationships with the children, parenting perspectives, vacations, and last names?
2. When the Bible speaks of a man and a woman becoming “one flesh” through marriage, this includes but is much more than the sexual union (Genesis 2:24; cp. Ephesians 5:31).
 - a) “One flesh” is two individuals becoming one couple to share a life together. It is the uniting of hopes and dreams and the mutual sharing of heartaches and triumphs, “together as one.” It is true companionship.
 - b) It is loving your spouse as yourself (Ephesians 5:28-29) and even more so — sacrificially (Ephesians 5:25-27) and submissively (Ephesians 5:22-24). If we do not love our spouses enough to live with them in these ways, we will “grow apart” rather than “growing together.”

C. “It just didn’t work.”

1. We need to understand a couple of points. First, marriage is an institution of divine origin — this means God created it and therefore, if it is to be entered,

it must be constituted and maintained as His word dictates. Second, marriage is not “on a trial basis.” The vows (when scripturally based) include “until death do us part” (Romans 7:2-3). It is a lifetime commitment, not a “we’ll see how it goes” arrangement (cp. Matthew 19:6).

2. Saying “It just didn’t work out” is shifting the responsibility for failure to the institution that God created, and thus, in reality is blaming God.
 - a) The reality is that God’s institution of marriage works when we do it the way God ordained, and fails when we fail to maintain the duties and responsibilities He ordained in and for the union. Both the husband and the wife must fully understand and responsibly fulfill their obligations to each other consistently and faithfully, and be tenaciously committed to doing so “until death do us part.”
 - b) It is far too easy to blame the institution, circumstances, luck, or your spouse for failure and quit; instead of being willing to work hard together to make the marriage one that pleases God and is a blessing to us and society as a whole. But such is exactly what is required!
- D. “I wasn’t getting what I needed.”
1. Marriage, properly done, is mutually satisfying. God made Eve to be a “help meet” (Genesis 2:18).
 - a) Clearly the naming of the animals is part of the story of the creation of the woman. Moses saw in man’s naming of the animals his search for an appropriate companion.
 - b) “Suitable helper” (NASB, NIV) would be better be translated “helper matching him”, i.e. supplying what he lacks. Husbands and wives complement each other.
 2. Philippians 2:1-4 is not specifically addressing marriage, but applying those principles will surely help make your marriage mutually satisfying.
 - a) A man must put his wife’s interest above all others, even his parents. He will leave his father and mother, not by going to live elsewhere but by putting his very important duty to care for them (Exodus 20:12) second to his duty to look after his wife (cp. Ephesians 5:25-29).
 - b) If we love as we should, joy is found in putting the needs of our spouse ahead of our own, and then meeting those needs (cp. 1 Corinthians 10:24, 31; Galatians 6:2).

II. Four Ways To Avoid Divorce

- A. Work on yourself.
 1. Remember why you got married, the love, the commitment, the dreams and aspiration for your future together, wanting to raise your family in a loving home, etc. (Proverbs 5:18). Remember the reasons you fell in love, remember what you want to accomplish together, remember the family you want for your kids, remember your vows (cp. Revelation 2:5).
 2. Fill yourself with wisdom from above (Colossians 3:12; James 3:17). You will never be able to convince your mate to be different if they cannot detect a difference in you.

3. Cleanse yourself of bitterness and wrath, and learn to be more patient and forgiving with your spouse (Ephesians 4:30-31).
- B. Learn to handle conflict.
1. If you truly focus on listening and not attacking, interrupting, and defending yourself you will likely discover what you each expect in your relationship (James 1:19).
 2. A lot of wisely handled conflict is produced from knowing how to respond (Proverbs 15:1, 18; 25:15; 29:22). One should never respond out of anger or speak in an abusive, corrupt way (Colossians 3:8).
 3. You may find that you need to work out specific issues, such as how much time to spend together or apart, finances, sex and affection, child rearing, sharing family responsibilities, and decision making. Some couples may be relieved to be renewing communication and notice real progress in how they are relating.
- C. Talk to others about the issues in your marriage.
1. When trials come in marriage the first or second response should not be to call it quits. But most times during a conflict you may want to call it quits because you just do not want to fight any longer for your marriage. But how healthy and filled with love, peace, loyalty, trust, and commitment would your marriage be if you stuck in there and fought to keep it?
 2. However, this may mean getting some help. When confronting issues that are beyond your ability to resolve, please seek the help of those who are heavily invested in seeing your family succeed. Elders, preachers, and loving members are ready to assist (Proverbs 1:5; 11:14; 15:22; 19:20).
- D. Safeguard yourself against an affair.
1. Be committed to God's standard of marriage (Psalm 119:9), and never look at adultery as an option. There are no circumstances under which it is right, nor is there justification for it.
 2. Control your mind (Matthew 5:27-28; James 1:14-15). Watch emotional attachment to people of other sexes. Do not cross the line of physical involvement (1 Corinthians 10:12). Adultery is not a victimless crime (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Conclusion. Please understand that God “hates divorce” (cp. Malachi 2:16) but gave us the institution of marriage for our ultimate satisfaction and joy. If we “do” marriage right, which is according to His arrangement and dictates, it provides a foretaste of Heaven. But if we attempt to “do” marriage according to our own arrangement and desires, it can surely be agony. Do not stand before God and your family and friends and lie — mean and keep those vows so that you can reap all of the benefits God intended for “holy matrimony.”

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