

THE MYTHS OF DIVORCE

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Over the years, I have noticed that Christians who are in the process of seeking a divorce often use the same set of reasons to justify their decision to leave. While Christians disagree about what constitutes legitimate grounds for divorce, it is clear that many Christians divorce for all the wrong reasons. R.C. Sproul calls these reasons "myths" in his book *The Intimate Marriage*. If you understand how to gently respond to these myths, God may use you to help someone who is considering divorce.

Myth #1 - When the love has gone out of a marriage, it's better to get divorced.

Although this is clearly the world talking, Christians buy into it. The basis of marriage is not feelings of love. Instead, in God's design *commitment* is the basis of marriage and love is the fruit.

Myth #2 - It is better for children to go through a divorce than to live with parents who fight all the time.

Although parents in a truly unhappy marriage may sincerely believe this, it is usually a superficial rationalization. One way to test their sincerity is to ask them to read Judith Wallerstein's book, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, which articulates the many detrimental effects of divorce. If a couple still decides to go through with a divorce after reading these facts, they usually have to admit that it isn't the children they are looking out for, but their own selfish desires.

Myth #3 - God led me to this divorce.

People often say, "I know the Bible teaches that divorce usually isn't God's will, but in this case God has given me a real peace that this is right." This statement reveals an improper understanding of spiritual guidance, which elevates a sense of "inner peace" to such a level that it can overrule the clear teaching of Scripture itself. This view must be specifically exposed and refuted.

One way to do this is to help people see that a sense of inner peace is not a conclusive sign of God's approval. I often ask people whether they think Jesus felt inner peace in the Garden of Gethsemane. I try to help them see that in fact he was filled with apprehension and agony. If he had walked out the other side of the garden, he might have had a great sense of relief at escaping the crucifixion, but in doing so he would have been turning his back on God's will. In a similar way, divorce may promise immediate relief, but in the end it too is usually contrary to the will of God.

Myth #4 - Surely a loving God would not want someone to stay in such an unhappy situation.

This myth is based on a presupposition that God's purpose in life revolves around me and my happiness. When someone tries to use this reason, ask him or her to unfold what it means to say, "A loving God wouldn't want people to suffer this way." Ask him to think of the persecuted church in first-century Rome. If he had been asked to counsel the Christians who were about to be sent out to the lions, would he have said to them, "Surely a loving God would not want Christians to suffer like this"? What would have happened to the early church if those Christians had believed such a notion? This kind of word picture may help people begin to understand that they have believed a lie.

It is crucial to help suffering people understand that God has something far more important in mind for His people than pleasant lives. His purpose is to conform us to the likeness of His Son (Rom. 8:28-29). The Bible teaches that this requires pruning, melting, and purifying to burn away the dross in our lives, and this is often done through the furnace of suffering (Rom. 5:3-9).

Myth #5 - I know it's wrong, but God is forgiving.

You have probably heard this statement. Contrast it with Moses' stern warning to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 29:19-21. I think it could be paraphrased like this: "If you presume that you can sin deliberately and then just say magic words and God will forgive you, how great will His wrath be upon you!" It is a frightful thing to sin deliberately. How can people presume that God will actually give them a repentant heart after they persist in willful disobedience? (See Heb. 3:7-13; 12:16-17; Eph. 4:30; Prov. 28:14.)

Imagine that a woman needs some cash, and so she plans a bank robbery. After she steals the money, she runs down the street and ducks into an alley. It is clear that she has gotten away. Then she puts the money down and says, "God, I'm so sorry. It was wrong to rob that bank. Please forgive me. Thank you, Lord." Could she just pick up the money and walk away? Most people will admit that she could not. What is the evidence of genuine repentance? The evidence would be undoing the harm of the original wrong by picking the money up and taking it back to the bank. Similarly, someone considering a sinful divorce should not look ahead to a cheap forgiveness, but should turn around and do everything possible to seek reconciliation and a restoration of the marriage.
