

# GROW IN GRACE

NEWSLETTER

**Volume 39, No.17, April 23, 2013** / Southside Baptist Church & Christian School / P.O. Box 1594 / 1028 South Water Avenue, Gallatin, TN 37066 (615) 452-5951 / **"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our LORD and Saviour JESUS CHRIST. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen."** (2 Peter 3:18)

## SHALL I STAY IN MY PRESENT MARRIAGE?

**"The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" (Matthew 19:3)**

When Jesus was upon earth, there were several **different schools of thought among the Jews** as to acceptable reasons for divorce. Two thousand years later, there are still many opinions on this subject. **Most Christian books which deal with marriage, most of the pulpits of the land, along with very influential Bible Study Bibles — these are all united in promoting that there are several grounds for divorce and remarriage which are acceptable to God. Simultaneously, the divorce rate among Church folk is about the same and in some states higher than for those outside the church! When so many promote acceptance of divorce— should we be surprised? All of this makes it even more amazing to see how Jesus dealt with the Pharisees on this subject! Reading the relevant passages one finds that,**

(1) **Jesus ignored** the common opinions of the "religious" authorities of that day.

(2) **Jesus turned** to the Sacred Scriptures as the only real authority.

(3) Indeed, **Jesus** (along with Paul) **went back to Genesis** when answering marriage/divorce questions. This is no surprise, for as John 1:1-3, 14 reminds us— JESUS is the Creator God who is revealed in Genesis! So, of course, Jesus would go back to His original intention! **Thus, God's first word** (The first word of Jesus!) **on marriage is found in Genesis 1:27; 2:18-25! And as stated,** Jesus returned to Genesis when stating His position of the permanence of marriage. **PERSONALLY**, I cannot find that God, that Jesus has ever changed his mind! **Genesis 1:27; 2:18-25 remain in effect in our sin polluted world!** Furthermore, Jesus told the Pharisees that the bottom line reason for the various divorce statements by Moses was because of **"hardness of heart... but from the beginning [Genesis] it was not so."** In fact, Jesus gave an addition to the Genesis teaching:

**"What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"** (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9) When Jesus proclaimed the permanency of marriage between ONE MAN TO ONE WOMAN— **His disciples were absolutely**

**stunned!** (Matthew 19:3-10)

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Had Jesus simply agreed with any of the religious opinions of that day, it would have been no big deal. **Why were the disciples stunned? They knew that Jesus had just closed down all the loopholes!** Furthermore, they obviously realized a very restrictive meaning of the famous ‘exception clause’ of Matthew 19:9. [**Note:** The situation with Joseph and Mary would be a Biblical example of the reality of the ‘exception clause.’]

Realizing that the duly married, (male and female), couple has no righteous exit from marriage other than death, (Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39), **the Disciples were so stunned that they proclaimed, “If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is good not to marry!”** (Matthew 19:10) **Further note: Even if** one grants that the ‘exception clause’ permits divorce — there is certainly NO COMMAND, no requirement to divorce; and in Matthew 19 Jesus makes NO provision of marriage to someone else.

**In New Testament revelation about divorce and remarriage, JESUS** has not catered to mankind’s desires. God still hates divorce. (Mal. 2:13-16) And when someone starts talking about a loophole for divorce— **Jesus STILL says, “From the beginning, it was not so... what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder”** (Matthew 19:8, 19:6)

**CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING! MEASURE every word by the PURE WORD OF GOD! Apply the Scriptures to your PRESENT marriage. Also, ask yourself:** What are the needed words to those you know who are struggling in their present marriage? Those approaching marriage— what model do they need to see?

**\*\* FACE REALITY:** Allowing even the faintest possibility or option for divorce will sabotage your efforts in trying to work through a difficult marriage problem. You simply will not pay the high price of walking the Calvary Road if you are holding on to divorce as an option!

**\*\* If there has already been a divorce and remarriage, then please hear this:** There are no Scriptures that even hint that sins relating to divorce and/or remarriage are unforgivable. God hates divorce, (Malachi 2:16). He no doubt hates all sin. He will never place His blessing on sin. But some sins, God especially names as things He hates.

**\*\* However, God delights in and blesses those with repentant, broken and contrite hearts!** (Psalm 51:16-17; Proverbs 28:13; Isaiah 57:15)

**Here are important words to those of you who are already divorced and remarried... maybe even more than once:**

**1. There is no New Testament Scripture** that would call upon you to break up your present marriage. **There is no New Testament Scripture** that teaches that in order to show evidence of repentance, you would have to break your present marriage. (If there were, then 1 Corinthians 7 would have to read very different!)

2. Those of you with previous marriages and divorce in your background— many of you did what you did with some preacher’s blessing! Yet, you still have guilt! **The wonderful solution**, in all of these kinds of cases is to,

**(1) Take God’s point of view!** You missed the mark of God's standard. Call sin what it is! It’s sin! Make no excuse. With a broken heart for missing God’s good way, ask for, receive, and rejoice in God’s wonderful forgiveness. **Note: Maybe you are the “so-called” innocent party!** Even so, it is highly unlikely that you are totally without sin! (1 John 1:7-10) **Follow Daniel’s example.** He was a very godly man who experienced much hardship due to the sins of others in Israel. Yet, when he prayed, he did so, saying, “WE SINNED...!” Read Daniel 9!

**(2) Experience God’s blessing and favor** by committing to spend the rest of your life showing forth an incredible pattern of God’s love and mercy **in your present marriage!**

**(3) Openly testify,** “My previous spouse and I failed to experience God's all powerful love in our marriage. In our ignorance and/or rebellion, **we both** contributed to the failure of that marriage.” **“My present marriage?** Well, my present spouse and I have repented of our past sins against God and our former mates. **Our present marriage,** (while not an example of God’s clearly commanded pattern), is an example of His amazing mercy! And we are committed to glorifying God in this present marriage, “till death do us part!”

**\*\* “PLEASE, please, those of you struggling in your marriage—** it would break our hearts if you used our 'good second marriage' as any part of your excuse for wanting to divorce and find someone else.

**Our present marriage** is successful because we are now doing what we failed to do the first time— namely, submit to God and submit to one another in the fear of God!”

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**PLEASE NOTE:** We rejoice that here among the believers at Southside we have sweet fellowship with and labor with precious ones who have divorce in their background. Many are wonderful servants of the LORD. **At Southside— those with divorce and/or remarriage in their background** teach classes, lead Bible Studies, minister in Outreach activities, testify at our LORD'S SUPPER services, such men preach from the pulpit, various such men and women have gone on mission trips, sing in the Choir, sing special music, etc. **NONE of these dear saints are in any sense ‘second-class saints!’**

**\*\* Nevertheless, at Southside we do see a Biblical ministry limitation—** namely, that divorced men do not serve as pastors/elders or as deacons— 1 Tim. 3:1-15; Titus 1:5-9).

**RELATED: In counseling MANY couples through the years, I have noticed that** those folk who are defensive, bitter, and/or have unresolved conflicts from their past **often feel guilty and/or complain of being branded as second-class Christians.**

**However, those who have received forgiveness for their part in past failures**

**and those who have forgiven their offenders— they are free in Christ regardless of what others may think!** These are often tremendously effective servants of the LORD. Moreover, they don't want anyone to have to go through what they went through in their past. **Thus, they are all in favor of godly efforts to set forth high standards for marriage and to explain the sacredness of marriage.** They are easily at peace among differing brethren.

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**RESPONDING TO A HARD CASE:** Let's assume that you are in a most difficulty place. Your mate has committed adultery. **Maybe even like Hosea, you have a mate who has become a whore and is a deeply bound slave to sin.** Surely, you have “grounds” for divorce and “freedom” to remarry, all clearly based on Scripture—right? After all, you are the “innocent party”—right?

Well, if you are of that very, very small per cent of spouses who are mostly innocent, **then I expect that you have or can be given vision** (in the midst of your great trial)— **A VISION,**

**1. To rejoice that** you are being persecuted for righteousness sake! You remember that sometimes our enemies are they of our own household. Moreover, you keenly remember being dead in sin and under the wrath of God as others; and yet God had mercy upon you, a sinner.

**2. Thus, you are ready** to own your privilege to walk in the steps of Jesus, down the Calvary Road— to be redemptive, to invest love and kindness and forgiveness toward your offender.

**3. You are committed to overcoming evil with good.** You live on the edge of your seat in hope, because the offender may yet be won! Thus, you continue to love, to bless, to do good and pray. (Romans 12:14-21; Ephesians 4:32)

**4. Thus, when or if the door opens, you will be ready,** (as Hosea of olden time with wretched Gomer), **to “buy her back and to love her!”** (Hosea 3:1-5)

**HOWEVER, THESE ‘REDEMPTIVE’ THOUGHTS ARE, at times, SILENCED BECAUSE there are Pastors teaching that EVEN GOD HIMSELF IS A DIVORCEE! Yes, I there are those who claim that **God Himself is a divorcee.****

However, if this is true... then what we have is that God who says He 'hates divorce' is like the Pharisees! **He says but does not do! He preaches but does not practice what He preaches!**

He preaches redemption, love and forgiveness but finds loopholes to escape having to practice what He preaches in the difficult places! **I tremble when I read such careless remarks, claiming that God is a divorcee— when He plainly declares that He loves with an 'everlasting love!'** Read all the Old Testament statements of God's dealing with Israel. Yes, sin caused a separation. Yes, sin brought chastening! But God in His everlasting, unending love, (even as was pictured with Hosea and Gomer), brought and will bring His remnant home to Himself! The same is

true in the Jeremiah passages. **Don't just read Jeremiah 3:8 and claim a proof text in an attempt to justify a divorce. Also read Jeremiah 3:14!**

Moreover because of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:2-3; 15:7-21; 17:7) **the relationship between God and Israel can never be severed.** God has unconditionally and unilaterally bound Himself! **Romans 11 cries out, "Hath God cast away his people? GOD FORBID...!"**

**5. APPLICATION: Therefore, out of love and worship to Jesus— keep your marriage vow! Do not close the door.** If the door is to be closed, your offending spouse will have to do so by not only divorcing you but also by marrying someone else!

**SADLY, THE REALITY IS THAT MOST** who are claiming to be the “innocent party” are as guilty as sin! True, their mate may be the one who went out and committed adultery. But they both contributed tons to the failure of the marriage. **Often, the “innocent party” was consumed with** career, or sports, or hobbies, or ‘Christian’ ministry; or maybe he/she contributed much destruction to the marriage by anger, resentments, bitterness, etc.! **He/she may be many things; but “innocent” is not one of them! A man who spends YEARS destroying his spouse with neglect, lovelessness, anger and/or harshness and then presents himself as innocent is grossly deceived. It is a rare but wonderful day when such “innocent” parties are broken-hearted over their own sin:**

*“O LORD God, had I only been the spouse You called me to be— most likely I would not be facing this present trial. O God forgive me. O spouse, please forgive me. O God, change me! Help me to win back the heart of my spouse!”*

**Reality:** Sin always complicates things! You may feel that you have a very unique situation. There are certainly times when a spouse is 'basically' the innocent party; and they did not want nor seek divorce— but were divorced against their desires. **So now what? In this article we are not able to give a specific answer to every situation. However, the Scriptures in this article will serve all of us well—**

**1. Scriptures which** show that **God is still pro-marriage and anti-divorce.** (And Scriptures which give some clear instruction to those already divorced and remarried.)

**2. Scriptures that** call upon us to love and to forgive IN THE SAME MANNER as we have been loved and forgiven!

**3. Scriptures that remind us all** that each of us will have to stand before God and give an account— **it is not enough to have the blessing of all the pastors in the world!**

**REALITY: More and more divorced pastors are quick to bless divorce and remarriage for others. Nevertheless, God still hates divorce. God still calls Christians to demonstrate the HIGH ROAD miracles of redemption, love, forgiveness, and reconciliation!**

**4. Scriptures which** remind us that God's grace reached down to us when **we were the unlovable, the undeserving and the unresponsive. Now, let us be channels of His kind of love!** Who needs to experience the love of God more than a wayward spouse— most especially when we are the ones who **GREATLY WOUNDED THEM?** Christians often speak of praying for and laboring sacrificially on behalf of a lost soul for many years. To our spouse we vowed before God, 'For better, for worse... until **DEATH do us part!**' Shall we not labor for them and for the sacred marriage covenant?

Moreover, one sin never justifies another: So, your spouse violated his/her marriage vow. That is horrific! **But that does not justify you or require you to violate the vow you made— especially when it was YOUR SIN that helped bring destruction to your marriage in the first place!**

**5. Scriptures which call us to DENY OURSELVES,** to take up our cross and to follow Jesus! Function as **a believer priest**, make sure things are settled before God, in accordance with the Word of God... and then, go forward in peace.

**FRIEND: Remain in your present marriage and/or do not close the door to a troubled marriage or even one that is presently in a state of divorce where your spouse has not married anyone else— WHY?**

**1. BECAUSE** you refuse to set a limit on what God's love and forgiveness may want to accomplish **IN YOU** and through you.

**2. BECAUSE** as a Christian, the love of God has flooded your heart!

**3. BECAUSE** even **IF** the "exception clause" of Matthew 19:9, does grant you permission to divorce— **it most definitely does not command you to divorce!**

**4. However, you/we are commanded to walk in the steps of Jesus.** You/we are commanded to forgive and love even as God for Christ's sake forgives and loves us!

**Note: The theology of some people is that a New Testament Christian can be **DIVORCED** from Christ, that is, lose his/her salvation— then, yes, when or if Christ **DIVORCES** you, then, love as He loves.**

If HE will stop being redemptive to you, if He will give up all efforts to get you safely home to heaven— then, yes... love your earthly spouse as He loves you!

**That is our command— to love as He loves! (Eph. 5:25; 4:32)**

**Glory to God, the reality is that HIS LOVE never stops! He never 'divorces' any who are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb! GO FORTH,**



## loving as He loves!

**I sometimes here confessions like these:** “I just don’t have any love for my spouse.”

“God has not given me love for my spouse!” “God has given me love for this POTENTIAL spouse!” **RESPONSE: All of those statements are TOTALLY irrelevant!**

1. You PROMISED to love your spouse until death!

2. To every real Christian, GOD HAS GIVEN His Holy Spirit and He THEREFORE COMMANDS you/I/us to love our spouse! **For me to CLAIM that God has not GIVEN me love for my spouse is a giant SLANDER AGAINST GOD!** You/I/we should be on our face before God, repenting of GRIEVING AND QUENCHING THE HOLY SPIRIT!

**3. One's DIVORCE plans and/or remarriage plans may have the blessing of men; but do they find support in the Holy Word of God?** You and I will stand before God and each have to give an account. The only thing that really matters here is this— **Am I in line with God's Holy Word? Will my position stand in the Day of Judgment?**

**4. LET’S REMEMBER:** GOD was not up in heaven having an emotional *falling in love fit* over us! We were His enemies. We deserved hell. YET: He so loved He did something! HE SENT HIS SON! **Love is something sacrificial you do for the best interest of the other person. GO HOME AND LOVE YOUR SPOUSE! KEEP YOUR VOWS!**

**You/I/we are most definitely called to be redemptive toward offenders,** to invest in them even as God invested in you/me/us when we were still lost sinners. Remain in your present marriage and/or as much as possible seek reconciliation and be a channel for God’s unconditional, sacrificial, forgiving love— which He delights to pour out on **the unlovable, the undeserving and the unresponsive.**

*Besides, your marriage vow before God was “...till death do us part!”*  
**FINAL NOTE:** Yes, in our sin-filled world, there are times when for sheer safety of life and limb of the wife and children— there may need to be a time of protective separation. Even so, all the more is the need for the REDEMPTIVE VISION of Jesus for the sin enslaved! MOREOVER, many ‘wars’ in families will fade from or never get to red zones of physical danger if the following Scriptures are heeded: 1 Peter 2:19-21; 3:1-6; Romans 12:14-21.

Grace to all in Christ! James Bell

## SOUTHSIDE NEWS NOTES for April!

**1. Ladies Bible Study—(stay tune for the next study, after summer!**

**2. WEDNESDAYS: PRAYER SERVICE at 7:00PM! / YOUTH: Wednesdays, 6-8pm @ Southside Church building!**

**3. Thursdays @ 6:30pm: OUTREACH**

**4. Saturdays @ 8am: Men's Fellowship/Bible Study**

## **Sunday Schedule for April 28, 2013**

**1. 9:30am- Sunday School**

**2. 10:45am- Morning Worship / Children's Church**

**3. Noon Fellowship Meal {Covered Dish}**

**4. 1:00pm Early Afternoon Service**

**REMEMBER: 4/28/13 @ 1:00pm in Auditorium!**

**We gather for a Church family CONVERSATION  
about our Church Building/grounds and various Ministries.**

**MEMBERS and those Regularly attending are welcome.**

**(NOTE: LIKELY NEED SOME TO HELP WITH CHILD CARE)**