

**Series: FIT TO BE TIED—February 17, 2008**

## **DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE**

### **1 Corinthians 7:8-17**

#### **I. INTRO**

- A. Today as I head into this topic, I want **you** to know that **I** know that I'm in very sensitive, maybe painful territory in talking about divorce. I think I can confidently say that life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has left virtually **no one** untouched from the pain that divorce brings.
- There may be some of you this morning who are in a marriage that is chafed and raw and painful. To be honest, you're not sure **what** you want to hear right now.

-Some of you grew up in a family that went through a divorce when you were a kid. And you still feel the sadness inside that created.

-Some of you have been through a divorce as a husband or wife—and you know first hand that pain and loneliness and anger it creates. And you wonder if you'll ever feel normal and happy again.

- B. Let me tell you exactly where I'm going—and what my prayers are going into this talk. I want to be as clear as possible on what the Bible has to say about divorce and remarriage. To be honest, I think you'll be surprised at the wisdom God offers—as well as the grace He gives!

-Something else I want to say right up front. Sometimes the church has been guilty of shooting its wounded when it comes to divorce. At a time when people desperately need others to walk with them and help them through a horrible, lonely time—what they've felt from the church is judgment. If that's happened to you—I want to ask your forgiveness. That kind of stuff doesn't come from the God of love and compassion who leads His church and **especially** reaches out to those who have been left alone in this way.

-The message of Jesus is called—and has been called the **Gospel**. The **Good News**. If it's Good News for just a few, then it's **not** good news. It's Good News for everyone. **Everyone**. And I want to reassure you—the God of this Universe is the God of the second chance! He is the God who heals—for those whose hearts are broken. He is the God of peace and reconciliation—for those who may be in some messy break-up.

And He is the Shepherd—for those who need rest, who don't know which path to take, who feel broken and lost, and who are paralyzed with fear in some dark valley.

-And, best of all, He's God of the hard places. It's in tough bleak times that He does some of his most magnificent work in us!

-What this God says is the way to life! And my prayer is that everyone here would **find** life...and joy.

#### **II. DIVORCE IS RADICAL SURGERY**

- A. Paul was faced with the issue of divorce in the church he started in Corinth—and he needed to address it. Let me read what he said:

**And if you are married, stay married. This is the Master's command, not mine. If a wife should leave her husband, she must either remain single or else come back and make things right with him. And a husband has no right to get rid of his wife.**

For the rest of you who are in mixed marriages—Christian married to non-Christian—we have no explicit command from the Master.

So this is what you must do. If you are a man with a wife who is not a believer but who still wants to live with you, hold on to her. If you are a woman with a husband who is not a believer but he wants to live with you, hold on to him. The unbelieving husband shares to an extent in the holiness of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is likewise touched by the holiness of her husband.

Otherwise, your children would be left out; as it is, they also are included in the spiritual purposes of God.

On the other hand, if the unbelieving spouse walks out, you've got to let him or her go. You don't have to hold on desperately. God has called us to make the best of it, as peacefully as we can.

You never know, wife: The way you handle this might bring your husband not only back to you but to God. You never know, husband: The way you handle this might bring your wife not only back to you but to God.

(1 Corinthians 7:8-16 MSG)

-Notice his first statement. **If you're married, stay married. This is the Master's command not mine.** He's simply referring back to the well-known teachings of Jesus on this issue of divorce.

1. When Jesus came along, divorce was a problem in his culture, too. There was this huge debate raging between two 'big dog' rabbis: Hillel and Shammai. Hillel interpreted the OT provision for divorce to mean that a husband could divorce his wife for **any cause**.

-Hillel and his followers then defined what **any cause** meant. If a wife spoiled dinner, let her hair down around the house, argued loud enough to be heard next door, or rented two consecutive chick flicks from Rogers—he could divorce her. The last one actually **isn't** on the list. The **any cause** divorce became the most popular teaching in Israel.

-The other rabbi, Shammai, said that divorce was only permissible in cases of sexual immorality. He would've also agreed that divorce could take place when the other vows were broken—as they're listed in Exodus—the vow to provide his wife with food, clothing and love.

2. This is the background behind Jesus being asked about divorce in Matt. 19. Let me read it for you:

**Some Pharisees came and tried to trap him with this question: "Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife for just any reason?" "Haven't you read the Scriptures?" Jesus replied. "They record that from the beginning 'God made them male and female.' And he said, 'This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.'**

**Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together." "Then why did Moses say in the law that a man could give his wife a written notice of divorce and send her away?" they asked. Jesus replied, "Moses permitted divorce only as a concession to your hard hearts, but it was not what God had originally intended.**

**And I tell you this, whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery—unless his wife has been unfaithful.”  
(Matthew 19:3-9 NLT)**

- a. These religious professionals, in asking this question **where** they did geographically—were being really shrewd. Matthew, the author, makes it clear that they were in Judea, east of the Jordan. See, this was Herod’s jurisdiction—and it hadn’t been real long since he’d had John the Baptist executed for criticizing his divorce. He’d done exactly what Jesus referenced: Encouraged Herodias to divorce his brother Philip—so he could divorce his wife and marry here. Which he did. Herod had spies **everywhere!**  
=Jesus doesn’t even flinch. In fact, he’s quite defiant. “Want me to spell it out for you, boys? Herod can throw me in prison and whack off my head too—but it doesn’t change right and wrong. Herod is wrong. Herodias is wrong. That is **not** God’s plan for marriage. God’s plan is oneness! Permanent togetherness.
- b. Jesus is making it clear here that if you do the “any cause will do” thing when it comes to divorcing your spouse—and marrying someone you have your eye on—it’s adultery.

-The word Jesus uses here is *pornea*—the word from which we get pornography. It’s referring to a broad range of sexual unfaithfulness—which would include adultery and other things which would break a person’s vow to be faithful, which could include things like a deep, unrepentant involvement with pornography, phone sex, prostitutes—you get the general idea, I’m sure.

-Whenever a marriage breaks down, the goal is **always** repentance and reconciliation.  
But it takes **two** for that to happen. Sometimes a relationship has been so badly broken and damaged—it just can’t heal.

4. Some people have taken from this passage that the only biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage—**if** there are in fact **any**—is for adultery. And this has had disastrous consequences—spouses even being encouraged to hang around and put up with serious addictions and even physical abuse.

-That is **not** what Jesus is saying here! Jesus is dealing with a specific debate in that culture that was going on—and his audience would’ve understood that clearly. A marriage is not simply a vow to not be sexually unfaithful. It’s to love, provide for and be one with another person.

-Just so we’re **very** clear on this at The Olive Branch: If you are in a situation where you are being physically abused, you need to get out—and get away from that person. Don’t wait; do it now. In fact, the **only** hope for even the person who’s doing this to you is a strong wake-up call. Staying is neither loving—or smart! Jesus **never** taught **anyone** to do that!

B. That's the background to these words by Paul here in 1 Corinthians 7.

**And if you are married, stay married. This is the Master's command, not mine. If a wife should leave her husband, she must either remain single or else come back and make things right with him. And a husband has no right to get rid of his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:10-11 MSG).**

Paul is saying, "I too reject the **any cause** divorce option."

-Marriage, as an institution, was a disaster in the Roman world—where a man could get a divorce by simply walking out the door.

And Paul is saying here, "Don't live like that! Honor the vows you've made. Keep your promises. Live up to God's standard—not the Roman standard."

1. Jesus taught an all-Jewish audience—so he never had to address the issue of believers being married to pagans. So, Paul deals with this question head-on: What do you do when your faith in Jesus puts you in direct conflict with your spouse? This is an issue, isn't it? Some of them were saying, "Well, if I'm married to a pagan person—it will contaminate my spirituality! We're not going in the same direction!" And based on that, some were walking out on their spouses.

-Paul says, "Hey! Not so fast! If they want to keep the marriage, then stay with them! God can work in that situation. They won't contaminate your spirituality; you will infect **theirs!**" Pretty cool idea, eh?

2. In this context, Paul addresses the issue of **abandonment**. A person chooses to follow Jesus, and their spouse says, "Hey! I don't want your Jesus—and, to be honest, I don't want you either!" Paul's advice is, "Let them go. Your goal as a follower of Jesus is not to live in chaos—but peace under these circumstances." -When he says, "You're not **bound** under those circumstances," he's simply saying, "You're free to marry again." Later he qualifies this and makes it clear that we are to marry someone who is a believer as well.

3. Jesus was addressing a particular hot issue in his culture—not teaching on all the nuances of divorce, like abuse or abandonment. My point is—Paul is not **changing** what Jesus said at all—just expanding on it.

-In this passage, Paul is making it clear that God's plan for marriage is that people keep their promises and fulfill their vows—**even when it's hard!** But sometimes they don't. Sometimes **we** don't. Sometimes we need both the forgiveness and grace and restoration of God—and the one we've hurt. God's goal for **every** relationship is forgiveness and reconciliation. That's why you hear Paul tell these people to wait—to stay single when they've broken a relationship. Give God space to work and restore—and maybe redeem the situation!

C. There are a **lot** of people who would say, "Man! Is the Bible ever hardnosed on this issue!" Let me use an analogy for the sake of reference. Most hospitals and surgeons take a pretty restrictive approach when it comes to radical surgery and amputation and pulling the plug on a patient who seems beyond hope.

-Almost 2 years ago, after surgery on a blot-clot in his brain, my Dad went into cardiac arrest in ICU. They could've taken into account that he had a brain injury, he was 80 years old, he had so many stints in his heart he was setting off metal detectors, he'd lived

a full life.... But they didn't. It took them 10 minutes of CPR to get his heart going again. He only lived for another 9 months—but I'm **very** grateful for that 9 months. -Anyone here, besides me, glad that the medical community tries **everything** before amputating a leg, an arm—or pulling the plug?

1. When it comes to a relationship—I understand the pain—and the awful tension it creates. Two people fighting, crying, clawing—or just dead cold silence. Deep, hardened resentment. I know—and have both seen and felt anger. And to just be **very** vulnerable, I have thought things like, "**Anything** is better than this pain!" -And I think God would agree. Here's the problem: divorce doesn't solve the pain. At first there's a false sense of relief. But it doesn't last. Divorce is **radical surgery**. Unfortunately, we lose hope. We lose perspective. When it comes to making a decision to divorce, it's like we're the patient, the infection, the surgeon, the hospital and the rehab centre—all wrapped into one. It's kinda sad; when we **take** our vows, we want everyone to come be a part of it. When it comes to divorce, we tell others, "It's none of your business!" Truth is--we **need** help—and perspective.

2. In our culture, we've been fed a lie on the issue of divorce. Back in the 60s word on the street was, "Hey! Divorce is really no big deal! Kids are resilient, they get over it." People were writing books like "Constructive Divorce"—and the implication was that if marriage didn't seem to work, it was a **get in, get out, get on with it** kind of deal.

-How many of you think you have to be careful **who** you believe—regardless of the letters and numbers they have after their name and on their car? The research that's been done over the past 25 years has been **devastating** to this point of view. And it's consistent across the board. Divorce does **way** more damage than anyone ever thought. If you think otherwise—you're kidding yourself.

3. What we've read about divorce in these various passages this morning, friends, is **not** human opinion. When God showed up here with skin on—and told us about life and how to live it--He said, "I know what's best on this—even when your pain tells you to get out and move on!"

-When people feel the pressure of a distressed marriage, divorce seems to be the magic pill that will relieve the stress and pain—and just allow them to get a fresh start and a new shot at happiness.

-There is a **huge** economic blow attached to divorce. Recent estimates show that divorce creates a 30% drop in standard of living for me and, get this, a 70% drop for women and children. When it comes to stress, divorce is ranked **above** the death of a close family member or a severe illness. It's often connected with depression, loneliness and low self-esteem.

-People generally get a divorce because they think it will make them happier. It doesn't. Divorce will not make you happier. A sociologist from the University of Chicago named Linda Waite recently completed a major study on this issue. They studied 5232 married adults, 645 of whom reported being unhappily married.

-Five years later, they interviewed them again. Some had divorced and some had stayed married. The stats blew them away: 8 out of 10 who had **avoided** divorce described themselves as happy, while only 19% of those who went through a divorce rated themselves as happy five years later.

-Why? It's because divorce unleashes a whole bunch of **unhappiness creators** that we never expect and have not control over. The anger of our ex-spouse, the kid's reactions, financial difficulty, custody stuff. The problem is that when we're under stress—our impulse is to escape, not think, "Are there **other** options?"

4. How does it affect kids? I've had friends head into a divorce saying things like, "Ahhh, the kids are sick of hearing us fight. They'll be happier and better off without the stress!" Most people have absolutely no idea how **vastly** untrue that is! The studies on children of divorce are consistent and predictable.

-Children from a divorce are seven times more likely to go through significant depression than those from families that haven't divorced. A book entitled, **The Divorce Decision** says that children from divorced families tend to have higher levels of behavioral problems in school, drug usage and problems with authority.

-Gary Chapman, a psychologist, says, "Divorce, unlike death, does not end the partner's contact with each other—especially where there are children. The nature of these contacts keep these wounds open and oozing with infection for years." Why? Because divorce doesn't end something—it just changes it.

And often not for the better. Soccer games, Christmas, birthdays, graduations—all these key moments become awkward. Both for the parents and for the children. It **hurts!** In my opinion, there are few worse things that someone can experience!

5. And, of course, divorce breaks your heart. One man said, "This loneliest feeling in the world is sitting in a courtroom where the person who knows you best formalizes their rejection of you." You feel like a failure. Sometimes, as many of you know, there **are** no options; you don't **have** a choice. But if you do have a choice—explore **all** the other options of reconciliation. Don't let a relationship go with a whimper. Shoot up the flares. Yell for help!

### III. WHAT NOW?

- A. One of the things Paul says here in dealing with this issue of divorce shows both wisdom and grace.

**If a wife should leave her husband, she must either remain single or else come back and make things right with him. And a husband has no right to get rid of his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:10-11 MSG)**

-Some of you may be thinking, "You call that **grace?**" Here's the deal. The lines have already been clearly drawn in the Bible. Divorce is radical surgery—the **last** option.

1. That means that, as tough as the relationship might seem, it is probably salvageable. Love can be rekindled. Paul is a realist. Sometimes a relationship gets so chafed and raw and infected—people leave. It happens. But the goal, with followers of Jesus, is **always** reconciliation. That hard, tough hearts grow soft.

That both a husband and a wife have a lot of time to think and ask themselves, "Is this what I really want?"

-Let me tell you what **typically** happens—at least in our culture. People get lonely—and almost immediately start shopping for a new spouse—like they’re trading in a car.” “Who’s next? is the **wrong** question. I’ll tell you why.

-First, a separation and divorce—and all the anguish leading up to it—leave people broken and lonely. -People who are in that place can tell you **all** about their **ex**—all the things that were wrong with them, and why things could’ve **never** worked out and “he was **such** a jerk” and “she was **such** a witch.” But the **truth** is, in most cases—both were at fault. To be honest—and I speak from personal experience—it takes time to cool off, let down your defenses, and then see and admit where you were wrong.

-What happens when people jump into another relationship? Here are the facts. Today—when a couple gets married, they have about a 40-50% chance of a divorce. If you’ve been divorced once, there’s a 60% chance your second marriage will end in divorce. For third marriages—about 75%.

2. The advice Paul gives is **wise** because it gives time for someone who’s been separated—or divorced—to figure out who they are as a single person. To understand themselves. To see what went wrong. To get the help and counsel of others. To protect themselves from getting sexually involved with someone else. -Basically, to **not** jump headfirst into a situation that seems **simply wonderful**—but ultimately jacks the pain quotient through the ceiling.

B. Speaking of pain—it is **so** important if you have experienced a divorce to heal. Your heart has suffered a tremendous hit—and my heart goes out to you. I’m **so** sorry for what you’ve experienced—really. You could say to me, “Yeah, Ken, but **you** don’t know what it’s like.” And I’d have to admit that I don’t. But there’s someone here, right now, who does—who Himself has experienced divorce. It’s God.

1. Over and over the prophets of the Old Testament use the image of a marriage to describe the nation of Israel’s relationship with God. God made a **covenant** with Israel—which is what wedding vows are. He did that because He loved her. God would provide for her, care for her, love her, and be faithful to her.

-God’s simply asked His people to love Him, to trust Him--to be faithful to Him in return. Time after time, God spoke, God loved, God gave—God gave 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> chances. And eventually as they got further and further away in their unfaithfulness, there’s this heart-wrenching statement.

**I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. (Jeremiah 3:8 TNIV)**

-After all the pain and hurt and humiliation God went through—it makes sense when God, a divorcee, says through the prophet Malachi, **I hate divorce!**

He’s a divorcee—so He doesn’t hate those who have experienced divorce. He hates what it does. He knows the anguish it creates.

-God would say to you this morning, **I’ve been through the humiliation of being rejected...**

-God says, ***I know all about the pain of being betrayed. I do.***

-God says, ***I know what it's like to have a hard-hearted person break their vows. I know. I know!***

2. I love what author, John Ortberg, says. "It would appear that God invented the first divorce recovery program at a place called Calvary." That's why He gave His life—spilled His blood—so that hard-hearted, vow-breakers like me could find His love and compassion—and a ***second chance!*** I just want to say this; any church that divides followers of Jesus up into superior, first class, non-divorced people—and inferior, beaten-down, second-class Christians is way, ***way*** off track. And you need to know—that was ***never*** the intent behind what either Jesus said—or Paul said about divorce.
  
3. -As God's experience proves in this—sometimes there are no other options.  
 I loved a message that Bruxy Cavey from The Meeting House gave on this issue. God is using Bruxy in some magnificent ways in the GTA and beyond. You may or may not know that Bruxy has experienced divorce. He was dealing with the question, "What now? I'm in my second marriage, I realize that what I did was wrong—so what do I do? Sleep in the basement?"  
 -He says, "Acknowledging that you did something wrong is not a big deal. We sometimes try to find our self-esteem by proving that we're perfect: ***Are you trying to tell me that I made a mistake?!?*** What's the problem with saying, "I made a mistake. A big one. I went through a selfish phase. I made some stupid choices. Now I find myself in a situation that I technically shouldn't be in. It's wrong."  
 -And ***that's*** when God says, "That's music to my ears!" Because God is all over forgiving sin. When we say, "This is sin!" ***then*** He can offer forgiveness." But there is ***no*** forgiveness—***no forgiveness*** for people who say, "I don't need it! Wasn't me! I haven't done anything I need forgiven for!"
  
4. If you've been through a divorce, I don't need to talk anymore about pain—you know what ***pain*** is all about. . But you do need to know that there is grace and there is forgiveness and there is hope. In the same book where God describes His divorce, God is talking to his people who have been sent into exile in Babylon. You'd think he'd take this opportunity to shame them. Make them feel really, ***really*** bad! But He says these tender words to them. If I were you, I'd claim them for your own today—***wherever*** you find yourself!  
***"For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."***  
**(Jeremiah 29:11 NLT)**  
 -I'd like to make some suggestions that have come from a number of ***really*** wise writers and speakers.
  - a. Some of you had parents who divorced—and you ***hated*** their divorce!  
 It turned your world upside down; it ruined your holidays—as you got passed around between relatives jockeying for your love. Maybe you had a parent who tried to pass on their hatred and resentment to you. I mean—it affected ***every*** part of your life!

-You need to know—it wasn't your fault—at **all!** Your parents were two frail humans, trying to learn to love and commit in an unloving, uncommitted world—and they didn't make it. And you will need to forgive them to move on. What happened to their marriage in **no** way messes with the hope and future God has promised you.

-Process what happened to you, figure out how it's affected your view of life, of marriage, and of the opposite sex. And walk toward **hope!**

- b. If you've gone through a divorce—or had parents who did, you **must** let go of the past if you're going to move toward the hope and the future God promises. Some of you desperately wanted your relationship to work—but your spouse didn't, and you have been thrown into a life you never wanted. -And **now** you have to let go of what could have been, and what other people think. And you'll need to let go of your instincts to inflict as much pain on your ex as they've inflicted on you. And you'll have to let go of your fear of being alone. There are worse things than being alone.
- b. The second thing you'll need to do—and this is hard—and that's to accept an appropriate amount of responsibility for what happened. If you get into "blame and defend" mode, it will sabotage your future relationships.
- c. Lewis Smedes says that we humans, who hurt each other deeply, have to accept and take advantage of God's gift to hurt people. The gift of forgiveness. Bitterness and resentment feels **so** right. But it's poison. Right now, your heart is wounded—and that is **exactly** where the poison will settle. You will have to see the hatred—name it, and **choose** to forgive. -If you don't—it will kill both your hope and your future. It's just a matter of time. Forgiveness is hard, but unforgiveness is harder. I find, for me, it starts with a decision—and I have to just keep choosing it until I've vomited up all my hatred—and the forgiveness takes root in my heart. Then I find peace.
- d. And let God walk with you. See, many times it's at the point of deep pain—where He meets you and loves you and heals you. You'll be tempted to drift. Don't! He's your hope and your future! He's the God of the second chance. And you'd be **surprised** what He can do when it seems that everything is dead. He does his best work in graveyards, you know!

#### IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- A. Some of you are, at this point, considering marrying again. I want to ask you a favor. Would you be willing to come back next week when I talk about, "Look for rocks *before* you dive!" It's about choosing a partner—and I think it will be helpful. Will you do that?
- B. The second issue is way more serious. Some of you this morning are in a marriage that is just not clicking. It's possible that no one even knows this—but **you** do. You're aching for relief from the stress and pain—and you think divorce is the answer. I want you to remember—divorce is radical surgery. And there is help. There is way more hope than you'd ever guess.
  - Wherever you are, whatever you feel, don't ever underestimate the power of God to transform you, give you hope, to help you endure—and give you love that just doesn't give up. Our God is a promise-keeping God—who backs up our promises with all the power of Heaven. And that's Good News!