**God, What Do You Think of Divorce?**

**May 16-17, 2015**

**Rich Nathan**

**Matthew 19:1-12**

***God, I Have a Question series***

**Sermon Summary**

1. **Why get divorced?**
   1. **God is a divorcee**
   2. **People may divorce**
2. **How to not get divorced?**
   1. **Choose well**
   2. **Listen to advice**
   3. **Go slow**
   4. **Understand marriage’s purpose**
3. **Why not get divorced?**
   1. **For the sake of your kids**
   2. **For the sake of your happiness**
   3. **For the sake of your vows**

Rich opened his sermon with examples from the media with opinions from each pole of the spectrum pertaining to the topic of divorce. On one end we have Gwyneth Paltrow and her “conscious uncoupling” and at the other end we have a best-selling Baptist pastor claiming there is never any biblical ground for divorce. And of course there are a plethora of opinions in between to muddy our thinking and leave us confused.

The first thing we need to remember when discussing divorce is that God Himself is a divorcee. We know God by many different names, but perhaps the most remarkable is that He is a divorcee. The idea is that God married the nation of Israel through his covenant at Mt. Sinai. He didn’t only give people a bunch of rules to live by. The Old Testament was a marriage covenant. God became husband and the people of Israel his wife. But over the years the people of Israel strayed. They were faithless to their marriage partner and they committed spiritual adultery by turning from their husband, God, and worshipping idols. And even though God forgave them over and over again, the people of Israel were hard-hearted and refused to repent of their adultery. And so God reluctantly divorced them and sent the nation of Israel off into exile.

Jesus did not say that people are not permitted to divorce. He said that they *should not.* Due to our fallen world He recognizes that it does happen. The Pharisees in this passage asked Jesus a very pointed question, not if He believed in the traditional grounds for divorce but what the meaning of Deuteronomy 24:1 was. Jesus is not saying that adultery is the only reason for divorce, He was just answering their question in regards to the debate of the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1. Jesus goes on to state that Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of their hearts. God was a reluctant divorcee and you may be a reluctant divorcee in this fallen world.

In a more positive light, divorce rates in America are going down. You may ask, how can I protect myself against divorce? Rich gives us a few ways. We can start by choosing our spouse well, we can listen to advice, we can go slowly and we can understand marriage’s purpose. If we are already in a deteriorating marriage Rich tells us reasons to *remain* in our marriage are for the sake of our kids, the sake of our happiness and the sake of our vows. Despite popular belief, getting a divorce will not only make us unhappy; we will actually become even more miserable as we deal with a host of new complications brought upon us by the divorce. If you’re currently in the midst of a marriage that is hanging on by barely a thread, the church has programs that can help. Contact the front desk (614-890-0000) for marriage and family or the counseling center for assistance.

**Link to the Sermon**

* Before Rich’s sermon this past weekend, what preconceived beliefs did you have in regards to divorce? Were those based on what you grew up being taught, lessons from a church or religion or possibly the general society?
* Was this the first time you have ever heard of God being a divorcee? How did this challenge your belief of who God is?
* Rich mentioned that millions of people in our country have been affected by divorce in some way. Have you personally been affected by divorce? If you feel comfortable doing so, explain how.

**Study**

**Genesis 1:26-31**

***26****Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+1&version=NIV" \l "fen-NIV-26a)] and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”*

***27****So God created mankind in his own image,  
    in the image of God he created them;  
    male and female he created them.*

***28****God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*

***29****Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.****30****And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.*

***31****God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.*

**Genesis 2:18-25**

***18****The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”*

***19****Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.****20****So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.*

*But for Adam[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%202&version=NIV" \l "fen-NIV-51f)] no suitable helper was found.****21****So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs[[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%202&version=NIV" \l "fen-NIV-52g)] and then closed up the place with flesh.****22****Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib[[h](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%202&version=NIV" \l "fen-NIV-53h)] he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.*

***23****The man said,*

*“This is now bone of my bones  
    and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called ‘woman,’  
    for she was taken out of man.”*

***24****That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

***25****Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*

**Background and Context**

*Christians and Jews alike believe that Moses is the author of Genesis. The title is derived from the opening words of the book and means an account of “origins” or “beginnings.” The bible assumes (never argues or attempts to prove) God’s existence: “In the beginning God…”*

*Genesis 1-3 sets the stage for the entire biblical narrative and answers life’s biggest, most important questions:*

* *Who is God? What is He like?*
* *Who is man? And woman? Why are we here—what is our purpose?*
* *How are we to relate to all the rest of creation—the planet, the other creatures?*
* *What went wrong??*

*Going back to the beginning is key to understanding meaning and purpose, so for today’s study concerning marriage, we (like Jesus in Matthew 19) will go back to the beginning.*

**Discussion**

1. **Read through Genesis 1:26-31 out loud. List all the things we learn from the passage about the creation of man and woman. What do you think it means to be “made in God’s image?” Why is this important for us to know *at the beginning*?**

*The creation of humankind involved some planning on God’s part—as Christians we understand that God the Father is consulting with God the Son. (We also see God the Spirit in 1:2, so the Trinity is actively engaged in creation.) This also tells us the importance God gives to people. In ancient times, rulers would place images of themselves throughout conquered territory to establish their reign. God, to establish He rule and reign (His kingdom) over all of creation sets out to place His image (in people) throughout the earth. To be made in God’s image is often thought to mean that we share some of God’s attributes—like His ability to reason, for example. But a better way to understand being made in His image is that people are made to be God’s representatives on earth, particularly to represent His righteous and good rule. It also means that like God, we are created to be in relationship. It is essential for us to know our purpose (why we were made) in order to fully understand how God wants us to live.*

1. **In verse 27 it is stated twice that people are created in God’s image but also that people are created *male and female.* What does that statement communicate to you? Why do you think it is important?**

*God transcends gender (even though Jesus of Nazareth is a man). But as for people, we are either male or female. After our humanity, this is the most basic aspect of our identity. It is the design of God from the beginning and an aspect of being made in His image. Our gender identity, therefore, is not our own idea, or simply a matter of society, culture or our upbringing—it is a fundamental part of what God intended for people from the beginning. Like everything in our fallen world, our gender identities are often twisted and distorted by sin. One way we understand/appreciate our maleness or femaleness is through relationship with the other.*

1. **How does this passage describe/explain people’s relationship to other creatures (v.28)? What do you think are some of the implications of this statement?**

*As image bearers of God and representatives of His reign, God gives people a position of authority and responsibility over both the physical earth and all the creatures. The value of caring for both the earth and all the animals is not simply a politically correct position but a mandate given to us by God from the beginning. While people are physically similar to the animals (God formed both from the dust of the ground: 2:7 and 2:19), people uniquely bear God’s image.*

1. **In verse 31, what is God’s conclusion about all that He has made? Why is this a significant statement? What are the practical implications for us today?**

*The declaration that it is all VERY GOOD is often in stark contrast to what many Christians believe—that the earth and the rest of creation is unimportant and going to burn! Many believe there is a dichotomy between the spiritual and the physical, and that God only values the spiritual and cares nothing about the physical. This is a Greek/Gnostic idea and not biblical! The notion that creation is, according to God, very good, ought to shape our values—the earth, the animals and our physical bodies are all VERY good!*

1. **Read through Genesis 2:18-25 out loud. For the first time God says something is *not good.* What is not good? Why do you think it is not good for Adam to be alone?**

*Because God who made us in His image is relational—therefore we NEED relationship. It is fundamental to who we are designed to be. We do not do well alone! It’s interesting to note that Adam doesn’t seem to be aware of the problem—it doesn’t say he feels lonely! It is God who recognizes Adam’s need for relationship. According to Genesis, it is a distortion of our created purpose to reject relationship and be alone.*

1. **What do you think a “suitable helper” means? How does God attempt to find a suitable helper? Why are the other creatures not suitable for Adam?**

*The idea in the Hebrew is someone who is a compliment to—someone who completes. Literally it means “like opposite.” God is saying that Adam needs someone who is like him but also different. What God does not create for Adam is a duplicate of himself. The Hebrew does not suggest any hierarchy, or that what Adam needs is someone who is good at helping him, like a servant. Adam names all the creatures, symbolizing his rule over them, but none of them are suitable helpers for him. Perhaps this process helps to highlight for Adam his need—a need he may not yet realize he has!*

1. **How does God provide a suitable helper for Adam? What is significant to you about this process? How does Adam respond?**

*Eve is literally a part of Adam. A repeated word in verses 21-24 is “flesh.” God created Eve from Adam’s flesh. Adam declares that Eve is indeed “flesh of my flesh.” And finally the scripture declares that unity—becoming “one flesh” is the defining purpose for man and woman. Adam is thrilled and verse 23 is the first recorded poem in the bible.*

1. **Verse 24 states the divine purpose for marriage. What is it? Practically, what does it mean to be “one flesh?” What does verse 25 mean to you?**

*According to verse 24, the marriage relationship between a man and woman, is to take priority over every other human relationship. The scriptures tell us that even the parent-child relationship is subordinated to marriage. Understanding this purpose—becoming one—has tremendous implications!*

* *You can’t become one with multiple people*
* *It’s damaging to become one and then break that apart—there is implied a tearing/wounding of flesh—which is perhaps what people experience when they divorce*
* *There is an exclusive aspect to marriage—there is not room for others (in-laws, parents, children) within the “one flesh”. While marriage doesn’t preclude the need for other relationships (we still need friends, sisters, brothers, parents, children, community) marriage is in a category by itself!*
* *It involves everything that we are (The notion that we can give someone only our bodies because we are divided into different parts—our physical selves, our spiritual selves, our emotional selves, etc. is not biblical but Greek/Gnostic.)*
* *Because of God’s purpose and design for marriage, it is something to be considered seriously!*

*Being naked and unashamed illustrates the transparency and vulnerability that is to characterize marriage. There should be no secrets, nothing hidden, nothing private and personal.*

**Discussion and Application**

*Your group is most likely made up of people in a variety of different life situations—some are married, some are divorced, some are remarried, some have never married. As children, they may have seen a good model of marriage or they may have watched an ugly, painful divorce. Their personal life experiences regarding marriage are probably also varied, ranging from very positive to very negative. Your group has considered God’s ideal and perfect plan for marriage as found in Genesis. Now allow some time to tell personal stories. Let people share how they have experienced some of God’s intended purposes for marriage or how, because of a failed relationship, they see the truth of what scripture teaches about marriage.*

**Ministry Time**

*As always, welcome the presence of God’s Spirit and ask for specific direction for ministry for your group.*

*Possible topics for prayer:*

* *Anyone in your group who is engaged or in a serious relationship and contemplating marriage*
* *Anyone who was deeply wounded by divorce—their parents’ or their own. Pray for healing, forgiveness and hope for the future.*
* *Anyone who is struggling in marriage—who feels stuck and like giving up.*
* *Anyone who feels called to minister to couples by becoming involved in Vineyard’s marriage and family ministry*