

Let's take a moment here to look at the really big picture. Throughout Scripture God uses the term "Bride" to describe the Church. This is a comforting thought to those of us who believe we are a part of the Church and are therefore the "Bride" waiting for the time that we will be joined for eternity with the Bridegroom — Jesus Christ (Rev. 21:2 and 9).

Wait a minute, "joined for eternity"? What are we thinking? When we refer to the relationship of Christ (the Bridegroom) to His Bride (the Church), we easily speak of *eternity* as the time frame and readily accept that eternity means eternity — for ever and ever. But if we so easily apply such a *temporary* time frame to *earthly* marriages, why do we not even question the time frame of eternity to the marriage of the church with Christ? Under the same standard we seem to so readily accept today, wouldn't He have the right of refusal, or couldn't He divorce his Bride? We say "of course not, the Church is His bride now and will be until it is delivered up to God for all of eternity. No way would we ever question His Word on that!! His promise is absolute and eternal." Can we really explain why we apply a different standard for marriage when it involves Christ and His Church than we do for the relationship He established for brides and grooms on this earth?

Let's take the discussion a step further. What does an earthly marriage provide that is also included in the relationship of Christ and His Church?

- His Bride is pure
- Exclusivity is expected – no other partners are accepted
- Past history is forgiven at entry into the relationship
- The bride will defend the bridegroom, and visa versa against all opposition to the union
- It is a secure relationship
- Freedom to be truthful and honest exists in the relationship
- The Bride is set apart from other suitors
- The Bride is held in high esteem
- The Bride is blessed now and forever
- Temptations exist, but devotion persists.

The comparisons could go on, but one thing is clear. When it comes to being the Bride of Christ, divorce is not a part of the agenda. When we operate on our emotions and within the rules accepted by this world, divorce *is* an option.

One of the greatest duties of the church today is to lead the way in teaching the permanence of marriage and to instill in all members of the Body the desire to respect and uphold the sanctity of marriage. It is one of our greatest gifts to the next generation.

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# DILIGENCE

*"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure." — Hebrews 6:11*

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## Concerning The Bride

For the past several years our nation has been experiencing numerous attacks on the institution of marriage as it is described in the Bible. Since the divorce rate in America is nearly 40%, many individuals are on their second or third marriage. As of 2003, slightly over a third (34.6%) of all births in the U.S. were to unmarried women. Lawmakers as well as health coverage companies are currently wrestling with exactly what is the *definition* of marriage. Multiple variations are being introduced that expand that definition to extend well beyond the Biblical definition of one man and one woman. The most common variation that is receiving the greatest amount of press coverage and perhaps causing the most controversy is that of same sex "marriage." But even without the introduction of same sex "marriage" we can still see that the institution of marriage is under serious attack today. So is it any wonder that there is a lack of confidence that marriage is an enduring institution?

The Bible defines marriage as a union between one man and one woman and with very few exceptions, is for life. Violation of this definition is no greater between humans and animals than it is between same sex partners. Either is a violation of God's definition and all attempts to include *any* union other than the one authorized by God in the definition of marriage is ridiculous and is not authorized by our Creator.

As Christians, we must realize that the impact of what the church teaches concerning marriage is of eternal consequence to many souls. Some may be lost as a direct result of teaching anything other than what the Bible clearly teaches. Many in the church today — feeling the need to be more inclusive — are setting aside the definitions found in Scripture and are adopting definitions of marriage that have been provided by and are accepted by the world. According to the Scriptures, the bond of marriage was established in such a way that would allow men and women to be united as one and therefore act on their sexual desires with the full approval of God. No other circumstance exists that is approved of by God for the purpose of fulfilling desires that would otherwise be considered sinful.

Society today (as well as many within the church) has mastered the art of *excusing* just about any sin simply by stating that since we have *all* sinned, no one has the *right* to tell anyone *else* that *they* are sinning. While it is true that we *are* all sinners, failing to teach the Biblical concept concerning marriage has a most severe impact on society and the eternal destiny of many people. The church must adhere to

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Biblical teaching regardless of how narrow it may seem to the society in which we currently live. To do anything less is to lay a foundation for future generations that is made of sand (Matt. 7:26-27). No matter how we feel in our hearts about this critical subject, the Bible speaks loud and clear as to the intentions and expectations of God Almighty concerning our behavior when the subject is marriage.

Society may very well dictate the statistics that we listed in the first paragraph of this article, but it does not determine their correctness in the eyes of God. While the frequency of occurrences of a wrong does not change its sinful character, it *does* dull our senses and increase our reluctance to stand for the truth as it is stated in the Bible. We must be on guard to never adopt the standards set by the world as our measure. This is however, very difficult to avoid doing in the world today.

The most common phrase heard, when the subject concerns sin in any form is, “You just don’t understand...” That may be true since we can’t possibly walk in another’s shoes but the reality of the matter is that *God does* understand, and He created each of us with the ability to choose right from wrong. We simply make terribly poor choices more often than perhaps we should.

The sin of sexual involvement outside the permissible bond of marriage is so accepted by society that it has become almost commonplace for the church to apologize when teaching the truth concerning this subject. This is often even true when the involvement concerns individuals who are both Christians and should therefore completely understand the Biblical perspective of their sin. Unfortunately however, when the issue involves marriage, the reasons for destroying — or excusing one’s self from — the only relationship authorized by God that allows for the exercise of sexual freedom is often as simple as making the statement, “I don’t love you anymore.” With that statement and an attorney at one’s side, a marriage can quite easily be *legally* dissolved. The “beauty”(?) of our society following such actions is that most everyone is more than willing to accept each of the now single individuals back into the pool of acceptable candidates for marriage. There is very little regard for the *Biblical* perspective of eligibility — only the world’s legal perspective of eligibility. And this is far too often true even among Christians. After the individuals are once again *legally* eligible and available for re-marriage — marry they do, and once again they are in a union blessed by god. Please note, god, not God. They now answer to a new master. The new master offers a completely inclusive standard. Society, and perhaps even the church views the couple as acceptable in the eyes of God. To do anything else is considered to be judgmental and — according to today’s standard of society, we must not be caught judging anyone’s actions no matter how clearly wrong they might be according to the Bible.

Tough talk! Cold! Mean! Unloving! Judgmental! These are all terms that have come to refer to anyone who will dare to suggest that God’s intention as stated in Scripture is very clear. Except under *very* limited circumstances, there is no  
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way to interpret His words to allow more than one marriage or to allow for sex outside the bonds of one single marriage between one male and one female. God was so thoughtful however, knowing man’s weaknesses, that He gave instructions concerning what a person is allowed to do if divorce does occur. Two possibilities exist. The first is that certain specific circumstances allow for remarriage. The second is that the rest of the situations require that the persons involved remain single.

*“I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.” (Matt. 19:9 KJV)*

*“A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.” (I Corinthians 7:39 NIV)*

*“To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.” (I Corinthians 7:10-11 NIV)*

*“To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. (I Cor. 7:12-15 NIV)*

Once again narrow are the choices given by God.

Now let us shift gears. It is one thing for a couple to determine that they will choose to leave behind a relationship that God ordained. But as we know, the impact on those two individuals is just the beginning of the people who will be affected by this one decision. The impact on society alone is obvious on the daily newscast. Incidences involving children who are not a part of a stable loving family with both a natural father and mother are almost daily occurrences now — not to mention the fact that economic costs, health issues and many other complications are worsened because of the decision to sever a marriage relationship. Once again however, *society* will tell us that the problems in the marriage were so severe that things are much better using divorce as the tool of choice.

So far in this article, we’ve only discussed the physical family. What is the impact on the spiritual family? Isn’t God able and willing to see that none should perish? (II Peter 3:9) And didn’t He allow divorce under the Law? (Matt. 13:3-9)