

Marriage: Love of Another Kind
#4: Broken Covenants & God's Eternal Mercy

Grady D. King grady@southmac.org
at <http://www.southmac.org/>

Introduction:

I speak to you this morning not only as your preacher, but your friend. And friends can speak heart to heart. What we are focusing on today is not just an exercise in religious communication--it is deeply personal.

I was 11 when my parents divorced--alcohol, adultery and a host of other issues were involved. I can tell you from the eyes and heart of an 11 year old boy--broken covenants have consequences on the lives of people for generations. The pain of broken covenants is real and we tend to forget the pain while drawing lines with our positions on divorce and remarriage. We are talking about people created in the image of God, not positions. It is only by the grace and mercy of God that any of us can heal from a broken covenant or offer hope to others.

Forgiveness is a process. It took me 25 years to forgive my father. So, if you are struggling to forgive--there is hope! Regardless of what happened in my own family--I always understood God's ideal and that divorce/covenant breaking is not the way to go. What the world calls "affairs," God calls "adultery" (Proverbs 6:27-35). Verse 32 is very poignant "But a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself." There are people in this church who can attest to the reality of this passage.

"Sin is dark, dangerous, damnable." --F.B. Meyer

The reality of God's forgiveness and our desire to forgive others is paramount to our soul and being God's people. "For as far as the heavens are above the earth so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:11-12).

A few weeks ago, we conducted a marriage survey. There were 34 responding to the "open comments" section. Fifty percent of the comments fell under the category of "broken covenants" or "signs of troubled marriages." God does not mince words about the breaking of covenant.

I. God hates divorce, But HE does not hate divorced people!
Malachi 2:10-16

The historical context of Malachi was Israel's idolatry--marrying foreign women, corruption at every level of society--including priests. (Malachi 1-3) Women were viewed as property and only men could divorce, apparently for just about any reason (Deut. 24:1f). This casual covenant breaking God despises. On top of all of this--they still expected God to show them favor because they were his people. How absurd! It is in this context that God makes it clear--"I hate divorce"--covenant breaking.

It is fundamentally against the character and nature of God.

II. Jesus knew that the real issue was "hard hearts."
Matthew 19:1-10

The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus in a legal argument. Much of their religious life was rooted in a "loop hole" mentality. They were notorious for binding "their" interpretations and rules on people (Mt. 23). Jesus clarifies God's original intent and why Moses allowed them to divorce--"hard hearts." Anytime we take a "loop hole" mentality to scripture or seek to justify our actions or what is in our hearts--the seeds of covenant breaking are sown. The phrase, "scriptural reason to divorce" has a tendency to be used as a "loop hole." The person who comes to me or the elders and says, "My husband or wife has committed adultery, don't I have a 'scriptural reason' to get out?" seldom wants to hear other "scriptural reasoning like 70 x 7=forgiveness and reconciliation. Yet, this is what God models from Genesis to Revelation. Easy--NO! Godly--Yes! Yet, sometimes people have no choice--they are victims of adultery, the choice of another person's "hard heart" or temptation of Satan. But I can say confidently--THERE IS NO "SCRIPTURAL REASON" TO DIVORCE! The exception clause in Mt. 19:9 is for the protection of women during the time of Jesus and only a concession to hard hearts, not God's truth or pleasure. God must become weary of all the "legal" games we play in the name of having a "scriptural reason" for divorce. Is there forgiveness and hope? YES! I couldn't preach if I thought there was no hope!

III. Forgiveness and Reconciliation is God's Way!
Ephesians 5:1-2; 21-33

Be imitators of God...live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. God took the initiative in Christ to offer forgiveness and reconciliation when we broke covenant. This is the key to understanding the husband and wife relationship in 5:21-33. Christian marriage is not about "self-fulfillment," but loving sacrifice.

At one of the lowest times in Israel's history, with the walls of Jerusalem torn down and the city in ashes, Jeremiah said-- "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end" (Lamentations 3:22). What a God! What a covenant keeper!

There are three critical relationship issues to deal with whenever a covenant has been broken and reconciliation is sought.

Love--Is there a reservoir of feeling and will?
Trust--Is there healthy accountability and a willingness to be intimate with feelings and behaviors.
Power--Is there a willingness not to punish? Who's the victim now? ("push buttons," "hold grudges," "make the incident a bronzed statue over the mantle," etc.)

All of these take time. It is part of the process of forgiving. An unforgiving spirit makes you a prisoner of your own heart! This is true regardless if you survived the "affair; or it ended in divorce; or you are striving to have a great marriage.

The Bottom Line:

If you have experienced broken covenant--lean on the mercy of God and commit to being an imitator of God.
If you have never experienced a broken marriage covenant, don't be arrogant and don't "settle for too little" in your marriage. Praise God that his "steadfast love never ceases."
Forgive! Forgive! Forgive! God is our only hope!

"He who cannot forgive another breaks the bridge over
which he must pass himself."
-George Herbert

Grady D. King, Minister
South MacArthur Church of Christ
grady@southmac.org