

## Divorce

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

This is about the fifth conversation loved ones that we have had together about marriage. And today I'd ask you to continue it with me and possibly all we'll be able to do is discuss divorce this morning. I was hoping that maybe we'd be able to touch on celibacy, but probably we'll just be able to deal with divorce and then give opportunities for questions. And I would really plead with you, brothers and sisters, to bring up the questions however difficult they might be.

I'd rather say I don't know what God wants us to do in that situation, I'd rather say that and at least bring the question up, then that you would keep quiet about it. So it is really important that we're real with each other this morning, don't you realize that? So, I'll give my little presentation and maybe God will use it to clear some things, but really what is important is the question time. And certainly, I would ask you not to 'pull punches' that's silly, because I'm not presenting myself as somebody who knows all the answers. I'm saying that here we are brothers and sisters of each other, in a society that is falling apart, and that is fraying at the edges, and we need to put our arms around each other and give each other whatever help we can.

And that's what's needed loved ones, so let's do that this morning. I don't feel in any way that I'm the authority. I feel that many of you dear ones, are suffering alone in the matter of divorce, and you have no guidance, and you have been to one counselor after another, and the thing is just as much a mess as ever. And what we badly need is a real sense of loving each other and wanting to help each other in this mess. So, that's what we'll do this morning.

I'd remind you again of the clear distinctions that we have drawn together here between humanist, secular civil marriage because there is such, and maybe most of us have been involved in such. Between humanist, civil secular marriage whether it took place in a registry office, or whether it took place in a church with a lot of white dresses and all kinds of flowers, and Christian marriage, or marriage as our Creator intended it to be and therefore in fact, marriage as we were made for.

So I'd remind you again of the clear distinctions that we drew between that secular idea of marriage and the Christian idea of marriage, or the humanist idea of marriage and God's idea of marriage. Secular marriage is based on our will. We see a nice looking girl, we want her. We see a nice looking guy, we want him. We feel we're going to be lonely in our old age; we want somebody to keep us company. That's our will. And Christian marriage, we've died to those things and we allow God's Spirit to show us whom he wants us to live with for the rest of our lives. God's will, that's one of the distinctions.

Secular marriage is based on our own will. Christian marriage is based on God's will. So, secular marriage takes place in the tearing, and rushing, and thundering of passion and selfish desire. Christian marriage takes place in the peace, and quiet, and serene calmness of God's presence. So, that's the first distinction. One is our own will; the other is God's will. The second distinction is that one is preoccupied with reproducing human images, our own image, maintaining our own image dominant in the partnership and if possible, producing other little human replicas of ourselves. Christian marriage is preoccupied with reproducing God's image. Reproducing God's image in us as we come together as a unique unity and the unique unity is different from the two separate parts and it is more like Jesus and then bringing about other people who will look like God himself. Bringing about others who are probably already alive here and enabling them to be born into God's kingdom of

his Spirit and begin to live like Jesus.

So the second distinction is secular marriage is preoccupied with reproducing our own image in the house itself, and little replicas of ourselves. Christian marriage is concerned with reproducing God's image in the house, and then bringing other people into the new birth in God's kingdom. Not excluding physical children but preoccupied with bringing people into the world who are like God and look like Jesus.

And the third distinction is that secular marriage is preoccupied with its own purposes. Marry to fulfill ourselves, to have a nice home, to be happy, that kind of thing. It's to fulfill our own purposes. Christian marriage is preoccupied with fulfilling God's purposes. Finding out why he put the two of us here on earth, in what particular way we're to bring the world under his will. In what particular way we're to do it that no one else can do exactly in that way. So, those are the three distinctions: the will; the image; and the purpose. Secular marriage is our will, our image, our purpose. Christian marriage is God's will, God's image, God's purpose. So, those were the distinctions.

Now loved ones, honestly if you would stop just paying lip service to those distinctions, and if you would really take them seriously, and stop taking them as some theory that it's possible to reject even if you're a Christian. If you'd start taking those distinctions seriously, all the light and life that is needed for a good marriage is in those distinctions, really.

Now, that's a desperately bold thing to say, but all the light and life that you need in your marriage is actually in those distinctions, if you would think about them and make them real in your own life. And to the extent that you do pay lip service to them and say, "Oh yeah well, the poor fella he's young and he's idealistic," and to the extent that you pay a lip service to them, to that extent your marriage will be uncertain and shaky and eventually will crumble.

Now could we look at the whole question of divorce? Because it's on the failure to do more than pay lip service to those distinctions that all the invalid causes of divorce are based. So, do you hear that? It's failure to be real about those distinctions that bring about all the invalid, unscriptural, unjustifiable causes for divorce in our society, because there are two sets of causes for divorce. One is utterly unbiblical, utterly unscriptural, utterly ungodly, utterly unjustifiable, and the other set are scriptural, and biblical, and are set forth by God as legitimate causes for divorce.

Now let's look at the first one. The first series of causes for divorce in our society, and if you don't mind I'd rather avoid those bluff terms of incompatibility, and mental torture, and all those terms that we invent, to justify our actions and I'd rather connect the invalid causes of divorce up with these distinctions. So the first distinction, you remember, was God's will and the first series of invalid causes for divorce is based on what we want out of the marriage.

We go into a marriage to satisfy our will not caring at all whether it's God's will or not, and it's from that action and attitude that a whole series of causes for divorce develop. Here's the way it goes, he's a blonde football player, he just looks the world, and he's surrounded by everybody who seem to be his friends. She has a bikini on, she looks magnificent, you decide you'll marry them and so one marries the other because he looks good, he's famous, he's strong, and he'll provide security. The other one marries her because she looks as if she'll give him electrifying thrills every hour of his life and they both marry each other because they expect that that way they'll

begin to count for something in the world. And so they don't only sound the old horns like mad because they're trying to tell the world something important has happened today, but they hope that those old automobile horns will sound right throughout their lives, and that they'll really count for something in society. And so they marry primarily because of what they want out of the marriage.

He gets fat, and his muscles sag, and worst of all he remains a kid. He always wants to play with the boys, and go out bowling with the boys instead of taking on the responsibilities of a husband. She never wears the bikini, and seems to live in the midst of diapers all the time. And they both begin to feel that the finances are in such chaos that they will certainly never account for anything in the society.

Now at that point when they have run out of their hope of getting their own wishes and their own way in that marriage, at that point the marriage has some chance of beginning to come onto a valid base. Because at last, they're getting thoroughly sickened of what they wanted out of the marriage and they're at the point where they might begin to find out what God wants in the marriage, and they might begin to be preoccupied with his will for their marriage now that they've run out of any hope of fulfilling their own will for the marriage. And yet often, that is the point where a marriage separates, and splits, and fails.

It's ironic you know, it's ironic that God has built in certain laws into our society and into our relationships together that mean that our invalid reasons for marriage over a period of years, are often exposed to us and yet we're so stupid, and so self-centered, and so indifferent to God that when our wishes for the marriage are frustrated, we determine that's the time when the marriage should cease. And yet, that's the very time when probably the marriage could come onto a real basis of God's will.

Now it's the same loved ones, with the whole business really of one's own image. Many of us go into marriage to preserve our own image and it's easy at the beginning, because at the beginning of marriage we emphasize, and often God allows us to emphasize the similarities that we have. The similarities in each other's personality and so it looks at the beginning as if, "You know, I am going to be able to maintain my own personality in this marriage. I am going to be able to reproduce it, and extend it, and perhaps even maintain it as the dominate personality." Because at the beginning of a marriage it's the similarities, it's the unity that we emphasize and that God allows us to emphasize.

And then as the months, and the years pass, we begin to discover how different we are. And we begin to not only discover how different we are, but it seems how increasingly different we are. And it seems that we differ on more, and more issues as the years and months pass. And of course, there's no mystery about that at all, for one thing, we had not the insight into the other person to really read them and we did not really read that person as they really were.

But secondly, that person has been growing, and developing, and has been changing, and often we'll say to each other, "You're not the person I married." Well of course you're not, and that's great that you're not because you grow as everybody else grows. But when that happens, many of us become insecure ourselves because we discover that, "This person, this little mouse that agreed with me on everything – I just made a comment about the African political situation and she said, 'Yeah.'" Or, "This fellow that didn't know anything about cooking at all, I just set it before him and he ate it, suddenly he's all preoccupied with a cholesterol free diet." And we begin to realize that this

person is beginning to threaten me and I may not be able to maintain my personality as the dominant one.

And so it goes on, and on, until eventually you're arguing about everything, and you're disagreeing about everything. And at last, at that point, where you give up maintaining your own image as the dominant one, and you give up hope of keeping your own character untouched and unchanged, just at that point when you've given up hope of that, and you're at last open to God creating a new personality out of the two of you, a new personality absolutely that will be beautiful and that will bring him glory, at that point because you can't maintain your personality as dominant, and because you're having to negotiate and to compromise with the other person, often at that point where a marriage can just begin to get onto God's lines and God's basis' the marriage fails and ceases.

And again, you know, it's like the little child who can't have his toys all to himself and so nobody is going to have them. If he can't have them all to himself then nobody is going to have them. Of course the truth is loved ones, that if you'd ever commit the thing to the Father, he would prevent you being utterly steamrollered. He would. He would prevent you being utterly steamrollered and he would maintain your personality. More than that, he would work on the other person and he would change them more, and more into his image so that you'd both began to create something completely new, and it would be something that would be beautiful for God. But loved ones, that's another reason why many people divorce. Simply because, they're developing as different personalities but they can't hack it because they want their personality to be dominant.

The same with the purpose, there's a whole series of invalid reasons for divorce, or causes for divorce in our society that are based on misunderstanding the purpose for which you married. Many of us don't marry for what God wants to do for us in the world at all, but we marry for our own purposes, we want to fulfill ourselves. And those purposes are really, usually, connected up with big house, big car, dream boat, dream car, dream house, quiet dinner parties, flowers and chocolates every evening, long vacations, and armies of babysitters. And it is the dumbest thing. It is dumb.

If we stood back and even just watched some of the old movies, we'd see that it wasn't like that. But, many of us go into marriage wanting our purposes fulfilled in that marriage, and wanting the marriage to be what we want it to be. And just as the first series of causes are connected with disappointments about our partner, so this one is connected with disappointments in what marriage is supposed to be. And in actual fact, we find that marriage is often preoccupied with the difficulties of running a house, or keeping the car going in the early days. It's often preoccupied with maybe no vacations at all. Often he forgets the chocolates and the flowers, and often there's such a preoccupation with financial difficulties that you have little time for each other at all.

And it's when that happens, that many loved ones say, "This marriage is not fulfilling the purpose that I had in mind for it and so I'm going to stop it." And yet, that's the very point when you've come to the end of hoping that your own purposes will be fulfilled, at that point you're just beginning to open to the possibility that there was some other greater purpose for this marriage that the Creator had in mind. At that very point when the marriage could at last move onto solid ground, usually it ends up in the courts, or it ends up in some miserable squabbling, fighting, emotional tangle.

Now loved ones, all those are invalid causes for marriage and all of us who are married happily, here in this auditorium, stand forward and say, "We are privileged to have experienced all those causes for divorce and we are alive to tell the tale." And that's true. Do you see, brothers and

sisters, there are dozens of us in this auditorium, me too, there are dozens of us who are happily married and we have had all those causes for divorce. We've had them for years often in our marriages. Our grandfathers, and our great grandparents, they all had those causes. Those are not valid causes for divorce, those are valid hopes for ever having a good marriage, because once you've got to the point where you have that kind of discontent and dissatisfaction, there is some chance that God will get your marriage onto the right base.

Loved ones, those reasons are no reasons. Those causes are no causes, and I would encourage everybody here loved ones, do not even think of them. Do not even think of it. The moment you begin to think of it, that moment it becomes conceivable and reasonable, and the next moment you're in the attorney's office. You don't even think of it. If that's all you got, then forget it, get down to working at the marriage and to finding out how God wants to change you to make it a good marriage. Those are the invalid causes.

What are the valid causes? Well loved ones, on the whole Jesus' answer of course is there are very few. Matthew 19:6, this is the spirit of his attitude and we ought to catch that right at the beginning. Matthew 19:6, now this is Jesus whom we believe is the unique only begotten Son of our Creator so that whenever we speak we believe the person who made our hands is speaking, you see. That's the importance of these verses, it's not just some religious leader like Buddha speaking, it's the Son of our Creator. Matthew 19:6, "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." That's the whole basis of the wedding service.

For as much John and Mary have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, by giving and receiving a ring, and by joining of hands, I pronounce that they be man and wife together in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Those whom God has joined together, let no man put asunder. That's the basis of marriage, not only Christian marriage it's the basis of marriage as our Maker meant it to be. Now, that's Jesus' basic attitude.

It's also Paul's basic attitude. 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, I want you to see these loved ones, because it's so clearly stated. "To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband)—and that the husband should not divorce his wife." So that's God's teaching.

There are two valid causes that God has set forth for us for divorce. One is physical unfaithfulness, the other is spiritual unfaithfulness. Matthew 19:9, "And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery." "And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery." And for many years I thought that it was sufficient to say so God was saying, "Alright, there's no reason for divorcing at all." And then the Holy Spirit showed me that I had to look at that phrase, "Except for unchastity." And so I'd ask you to read it, just in the English and it seems to me loved ones, that the normal interpretation of that is, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery. But whoever divorces his wife for unchastity and marries another does not commit adultery.

And I know there can be differences of opinion on remarriage, and I'm certainly open to that possibility that maybe there shouldn't be remarriage. But as far as I have light, anyway at this moment, and I have to share with you at least what light I have, as far as I have light, it seems to

me the verse means whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery and the opposite then is equally true, whoever divorces his wife for unchastity, for the cause of unchastity, that is a legitimate cause, adultery is a legitimate cause and marries another does not commit adultery.

So first of all physical unfaithfulness, secondly spiritual unfaithfulness. 1 Corinthians 7:15, spiritual unfaithfulness, that is where one partner is not a Christian and doesn't want to stay. "But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us to peace." And as far as the light is that I have received, it seems to me if you're not bound to the marriage than you're free to remarry in innocence. And again, I know some would question that in the light of verses 8-9 up there, but physical unfaithfulness is one reason, spiritual unfaithfulness is another.

I would only add it is important to see that many loved ones have really left their wives even though they're still with them. So, when we say physical unfaithfulness we really do mean that. In other words, there are some husbands and wives that stay with the other partner and keep up the appearance of a marriage but in actual fact they're jumping in and out of bed all around the cities. In actual fact they've left their husband, they've left their wives physically and they're now bent on making a mockery of marriage. Now there it's very important for the husband or the wife in that situation to see that they are on scriptural ground in thinking of divorce.

And yet loved ones, may I tell you the story of Hosea because God always calls us to act above the law wherever we believe we have the grace to do that. And you remember Hosea had a wife who left him and Hosea went out after her, and he found that she had become a prostitute. And so he wooed her again and brought her back to his home as his wife, and she stayed with him for another period of time and then ran away again. And this time, he discovered she had sold herself as a slave and he bought her back, and freed her, and reinstated her in the position of his wife. And God of course says, in that same way, "I have loved you. I have forgiven you, and forgiven you until 70 times seven." And so loved ones, obviously you have to keep in mind that teaching of Jesus that wherever you have grace, you should live above the law.

And so loved ones, will you question now and I'll try to answer?

Question from the audience:

What do you mean living above the law?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

Well, I thought Bill that the law of God was plainly stated in those verses that you could, if you wished, divorce on the grounds of physical or spiritual unfaithfulness, and you were justified in doing that, but that Jesus often called us to live above that law, and even to forgive, and be merciful, and not in fact, to claim your rights. But I think it is very important for brothers and sisters who hear that this morning to see that there are obviously times when you are actually doing harm to the other person by putting up with the situation. So all of us I think, are aware of wives who had alcoholic husbands, and had four or five children to bring up, and you remember in the old days there wasn't all the facility for divorce that there is now, and that dear woman just stayed with it, and stayed with it, and just put up with the beatings, and put up with the insults, and she eventually prayed all her children into the kingdom and prayed the man into the kingdom as well at

the end of their life.

So, many of us know stories of that Bill, and obviously God is able to use that. But, there are other situations where a husband or a wife is simply taking advantage of the other person. They're mocking them they're saying even, "You're a Christian you're supposed to let me do this. You're supposed to forgive me until 70 times seven while I go around from woman-to-woman or from man-to-man." Now in that situation, it seems to me, you have to take advantage of the hedge of the law that God has given. If you don't you're simply encouraging this dear one, not only to mock you, to mock marriage, but to mock God as well and perhaps they'll never stop in their tracks unless they see that sometimes some things have to stop.

Question from the audience:

What would the spiritual basis be to stay together if you are not married to a Christian?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

It seems to me Paul is saying if you are married to a non-Christian man or married to a non-Christian woman, and the man or the woman is willing to stay with you, then you are to stay with them and you are in every way to allow the Holy Spirit to use you to redeem them, to prepare them for heaven, to bring them into an awareness of Jesus by seeing Jesus live in you. So, it would seem if the other person is willing to stay then there is no question. In other words, there's no place for a Christian divorcing a non-Christian simply because they're non-Christian. The only reason is if the non-Christian does not want to stay with you.

I think if the partner was fed up, "I'm fed up with you going to that church all the time. I'm fed up with you going and singing hymns. I don't like your prayer and your bible study. I forbid you to go to church." I think a lot of loved ones have gotten into – I hope, two Sundays hence to deal with the whole business of authority and submission in marriage and I think a lot of us have come into ridiculous positions of submission that I think is an insult to human dignity. Where you have said, "If the man forbids me to go to church and I stop going to church," it would seem to me there is a spiritual justification for divorce on the basis of the scripture in Acts, "We must obey God rather than men."

No man or woman has the right to steal from us our relationship with God. Now at the same time I think that many loved ones could show much more forbearance over a much longer period than they do. It's like some of us sons and daughters who are so quick to get to 21 and get out from under that honor your father and mother that your days may be long, and we're so quick to say, "But we must obey God rather than them." And it seems to me it's very easy for a man or a woman to say, "Oh that's it, I must obey God rather than man so this man is forbidding me practicing my religion so I must get rid of him." I think it's very important that you're honest in your own heart, and spirit, and conscience about it and that it has really come to the point where the non-Christian partner does not want to stay and he will not let you remain a Christian yourself.

Question from the audience:

Is there any kind of bondage that is involved, if as a Christian you committed immorality with a non-Christian?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

It seems to me that you're caught in the whole statement that Jesus made, "If you unit your limbs or your members to a prostitute you are in fact forcing him to unit his limbs and his members with a prostitute." And it seems to me that's the worse, and the most terrible, and the greatest cruelty that anyone could do to anyone, and that is to force the loving Son of God who is our Savior to have intercourse with a prostitute. So it seems to me that that is far from bondage. It is an insult, and blasphemy against God, it is something that a man or a woman has to get before God and be very real about in their repentance. It seems to me.

Loved ones, if I could just push you a little more, do you see that there is conscious and unconscious sin. And I know this comes home as new to a lot of you but would you believe me that there is a little verse in scripture that says, "Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin." And that Christians are meant to be free from conscious sin. And it is a major tragedy; it is a major emergency in your own spiritual life if you knowingly do something that you know is wrong, really.

Now, I'm not saying God can't forgive you but I'm saying it is a major tragedy, it is a major emergency. You have got, with the Holy Spirit, to get down to the heart of why you did that thing. So that is what I would be more concerned about. More than some bondage or other, I'd be more concerned about a loved calling themselves a child of God and doing that.

When you repent of it and commit yourself to a clean life, then God puts the sin as far from him as the east is from the west. And I understand what you're saying, you're saying are there any natural consequences of sin that are – that are raised at the time of forgiveness? Well, I think the same as gonorrhea or the venereal diseases, in the same way that they bring about natural consequences in deformity in the children, so no doubt every sin brings about natural consequences that you have to live through and be healed from gradually as the months and years pass. But it seems to me from the point of view of God's relationship to you, if you come before him and you weep before him and say, "Lord, I have crucified you afresh. Lord, I give myself to you and I will never touch this kind of thing again." Then God forgives and restores you to this friendship right then.

The same way abortion has certain emotional consequences, I'm sure there are emotional things. On the other hand it's very easy for Satan to get in on you and say; "Now listen, you've gotten yourself into bondage here that you cannot escape from." And in that case it's important to call Satan's bluff and say, "No, there is nothing that I cannot do through Christ who strenghteneth me." And I have received the mind of Christ, and the new emotions of Christ, and the new body of Christ and this old body that did this thing was crucified with him and is dead and buried so I have a new life from him completely. And it's important to answer Satan strongly that way.

No – I was coming the other direction because I think a lot of us have been surprisingly lax about sexual immorality and I want us to see loved ones, you can't be a child of God and commit fornication. And fornication is lying with someone in bed and having intercourse with them who is not your wife or your husband. Now, you cannot do that. I don't even think you can go to town in a whole petting session and have a clean heart, and a clean mind, and remain in the fullness of God's favor.

So loved ones, you have to be real about that. You have to stop playing around with that. We have to be kind, and understanding, and gentle. We must understand the depths of the problem of loved ones who fall into homosexuality but never, never, never, never – old Churchill said, "Never, never, never, you can never accept that sin is consistent with a child of God." You can't. You can't.



Homosexuality is not in God's will. I don't care how many people visit President Carter, homosexuality is not in God's will. It is a sin. It is wrong. It is condemned back in Leviticus, Deuteronomy, right through scripture, right through Romans 1, it's wrong. So is fornication. So is intercourse outside marriage. So is uncleanness, uncleanness of any kind.

Loved ones, it is not what God wants for his children. It is not what he can tolerate for his children. He is a holy God and his Holy Spirit cannot live and flow in the heart of a person who does those things. Really, truly, loved ones.

Question from the audience:

What happened in the Corinthian church?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

Well you remember brother, Paul's strong words, you remember, of the man who was committing immorality with I think it was a relative or something, and you remember old Paul was just straight about it, "Deliver that man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh." And that meant that he disciplined him, he excluded him right out of the church so that man would know as far as God was concerned, the man was not in the grace of God at that time so that the Holy Spirit would begin to bring the seriousness of the situation to the man's conscience and the man would repent and would return and give his life again to Jesus.

But it seemed to me that Paul was emphasizing that those who are in the church, or those of us here this morning, we must be very clear that that kind of thing is not consistent with being a child of God. Yeah, I think that's what he meant.

Question from the audience:

Can you apply those words in Matthew, "Whom God has joined together let no man put asunder." Can you apply that to someone who enters into a secular civil marriage?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

No loved ones, you can't no. That's the whole bluff isn't it? The tragedy is that since old Constantine's time church became popular and then it became very respectable to have a white wedding and have it done by some preacher in some church to make it look good and then you could dress in white if you had behaved properly and that signified a whole degree of respectability. And yet, many of us went through that kind of wedding and it was really, in our minds, it was just a civil secular thing that had the blessing of the church upon it to please our parents and to please all our neighbors. But it wasn't really a Christian marriage.

And loved ones, the fact is you cannot apply Christian promises to non-Christians. So no, Anita you cannot apply that. But it's very different, you remember, as we shared before, it's very different with a person who is now married and married at a time when they were not Christians, or married not knowing fully what marriage was about. Loved ones, in that situation Paul's word is very clear, you remember, it's in 1 Corinthians 7:27. 1 Corinthians 7:27, because Anita I think some people then in that situation say, "Oh, well we weren't really Christians so we couldn't apply God's laws, or God's promises those whom God has joined together let no man put asunder so am I not free to break up this

marriage and now to have another marriage as a Christian?"

Well loved ones, it's plain 1 Corinthians 7:27 is the answer. "Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage." In other words, what you are when you're called to Jesus that's what you are to remain. And that might be of some help to those of you who have been divorced twice, or who have now come to some light about your life, you stay where you are. You do not cause unbearable pain to everybody by trying to retrace all these steps. You're married to a wife now, you're called to be faithful to that wife and the past is past and forgetting those things that are behind, now you go forward to Jesus, but you do now accept your responsibilities.

For those of us loved ones, that are just itching to get an excuse for a divorce, will you look at your heart and if you're itching for an excuse, is that not proof enough that you're not in God's will? Is that not proof enough? You know, if you're in a position where you're trying to think, "Oh well, when I married her or I married him I wasn't really a Christian. I didn't really know what I was doing so I'm not bound by it, am I?" Loved ones, of course you are, you're married to a wife. You're responsible to be faithful to that loved one.

And if you say to me, "Oh but how? If it was outside God's will how could it possibly be a successful marriage?" You remember the verses we quoted five Sundays ago which state quite plainly that God works in all things for good to them that love him and that God does not allow any trial to come upon us above what we are able to bear and with the trial itself, or the difficulty he provides grace in a way of escape. And so God does not allow you, even in your non-Christian state, to come into any relationship which he cannot redeem. And so there is no ground for you saying, "Oh well, God can't redeem this marriage because it took place outside his will. So, I will step outside his will in order to help him do something about it." You can't loved ones, there's no ground for it. No, "Are you bound to a wife?" Then you are to be faithful to that wife.

Question from the audience:

How much does a civil ceremony exert or have some binding effect on a marriage?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

You bring up the situation that I remember, in fact, the loved ones may remember here this morning in the time of the Jesus movement and the hippy movement it was pretty wild and I remember a couple coming to me and saying, "We married each other last week." So I kind of gulped and didn't show them that I was the least surprised and then married them the next week in their home. It seems brother that those of us who are in Jesus marry in a Christian ceremony not to bind ourselves to each other but because we want to glorify God in everything we do. And this is something precious that has happened to us. We know at last that God wants us together and so we want the rest of the body to rejoice in it, and we want their prayers, and we want them to bind themselves together with us and to see us now as a husband/wife ministry team with them. And so that's the heart of why we have a Christian service.

Now, the only reason therefore Christians bother with a license at all or not, or any kind of civil ceremony is because of Paul's strong words in Romans where he says, "Submit to those who are in authority over you and pray for the governments, and for the kings that are over you." And so we are obligated as children of God to submit to and respect every expression of the power of the sword

which is God's sustaining grace that preserves the world from chaos and disorder and therefore we are bound to submit to all the laws of our land.

Question from the audience:

If there is an unbelieving husband that wants to be freed and yet there are children whom this will damage then is there a place for the woman fighting in the courts and making it difficult for the freedom to come about?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

You remember, that Paul said, "You are justified in divorcing an unbelieving partner who wants to separate from you because you are called to peace and not to strife." And so I would think that would be the heart of it. The woman would have to decide in prayer, and in study, and in thought, and in counseling with other brothers and sisters in Jesus, would have to decide is this bringing more peace or more strife to our home? Then in the light of that then she would decide whether to fight to hold the husband or to let him go.

Now, in fact you all loved ones, would have to seek the Holy Spirit individually to see to what extent you fight in the courts. You would have to think about that and pray about that because that in itself I think, would require a great deal of careful discussion. In other words, how far do you protest and to what extent do you take advantage of the financial provisions that the law of the land has given and there I think, counseling from I would image, there are more attorneys here in this auditorium than perhaps anywhere else at this time on Sunday morning, there are many dear brothers who are close to Jesus and would be glad, I think, to give a little direction to those of us who are in that kind of situation.

So certainly if you need guidance in that way then you should get in touch with the office, and we could at least put you in touch with someone who could give maybe five minutes at the end of a morning service or that kind of thing. Now I think it would be very unfair to the legal profession if we expected them to give all kinds of free advice, but I think they would be prepared to give a little spiritual direction at the ends of morning services to those of us who want it.

Well loved ones, I think you probably realize yourself that we could go on, probably forever, on this so all I would do is I would stand – if I could grow a beard I would. If I could grow a beard and pretend I'm an old grandfatherly preacher from the 18th century, I would, and say, "Don't divorce. Don't divorce." You divorce when nothing else can be done and divorce solves nothing. Nothing. It makes problems. It makes problems. You stay with each other because many of us have had at times just to put our arms around each other and say, "Love, I don't understand it. I don't know why I acted like that. I don't feel I'm the right person at all for you, but God has allowed us to come together so we stay with it." And on that basis he'll be able to do something for the partnership. But loved ones, that's the way you go, really. Let us pray.

Dear Father, I pray for my brothers and sisters here this morning, and for myself and my wife, and Lord, we would pray that you would help us see things the right way around. Oh Father, we pray for loved ones here that are in the agonies and the death throes of their marriage. Holy Spirit, we pray now that you will bring them your way which is always a way of peace, even if everything doesn't turn out right, it's always the way of peace. You can always give us a view that brings us peace and contentment. Holy Spirit, we would pray that you do that for our dear brothers and

sisters here this morning who are in difficulties.

And then Lord, I pray for those marriages this morning that are having rocky times, and difficulties. Father I pray that you'll show them that this is you shaking it out of their hands so that you can get it into your own hands. And Lord, this is you showing them that their love was not real love and that you are now beginning to show them what real love is. It's directing our goodwill to a person because you have told us. And Lord, thank you that there's nothing firmer than that love. And I pray Father, for all the loved ones who are not married, that you by your Holy Spirit, will still the earthquake, and the thunder, and the fire, and will bring them that sound of gentle stillness that guides them to the partner you have for them.

And now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the Love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with each one of us now and until we see Jesus face-to-face. Amen.