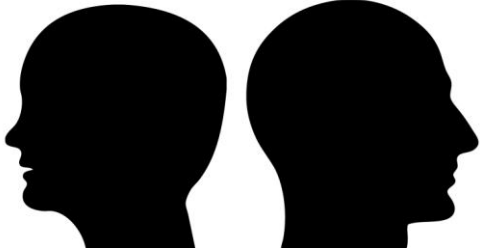


Divorce

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A genuine scar on society today is the soaring divorce rate among Christians and non-Christians alike. Rampant divorce has not only weakened the institution of marriage in general, but it has also weakened the institution of the family and been the source of heartache for millions of adults and children alike.

Marriage is Ordained of God and Not a Contract

In *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles “solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.” For all of its beauty and importance, marriage is increasingly thought of as disposable in the world and thus there has been an increase in divorce, even among the most devoted Christians.

The prophet David O McKay admonished the world that when they think of marriage “as a mere contract that may be entered into at pleasure . . . and severed at the first difficulty . . . [it] is an evil meriting severe condemnation” (David O. McKay, in Conference Report, Apr. 1969, 8–9; or “Structure of the Home Threatened by Irresponsibility and Divorce,” Improvement Era, June 1969, 5). This is said to be especially the case when children are involved.

The World Practically Encourages Couples to Divorce

In May of 2007 the firm of Fetman, Garland & Associates, Ltd., a Chicago-based law firm specializing in divorce, financed a billboard with two scantily clad bodies — one

male and one female — telling people that “Life’s short, get a Divorce.” Such are the thoughts of the world today when it comes to marriage and divorce. Music, TV shows, movies, and other forms of mainstream media treat lightly the subject of divorce to the point of considering broken marriages to be the norm in our society—nearly expected.

Divorce Rates among Christians

The Barna Group Ltd. conducted a study in 2004 which found approximately 35% of born again Christians in the United States have experienced divorce. Oddly enough the number was approximate to that of non-Christians. Divorce rates are relatively even among most Christian sects, with the exception being the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In a 1993 study published in the *Demography*, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were reported to be the least likely of all faith groups to divorce. The study estimated that after five years of marriage, only 13% of LDS couples had experienced divorced. (Bob Mims, “Mormons: High Conservatism, Low Divorce, Big Growth - 3/99,” Salt Lake Tribune, 1999-MAR-6).

If one considers LDS temple marriages, *The Los Angeles Times* reported the findings of Brigham Young University professor Daniel K. Judd in April of 2000 who estimated that only 6% of Latter-day Saints who marry in a temple ceremony subsequently experience divorce (William Lobdell, “Holy matrimony: In era of divorce, Mormon Temple weddings are built to last,” Los Angeles Times, 2000-APR-8).

The Lord Reluctantly Allows Marriage Dissolution

When contemplating exaltation in the eternities, a marriage that is worthy of such an honor is not one that considers divorce, let alone one that works towards divorce. While civil unions are meant to last for life, temple marriages are meant to last for all eternity—in both cases divorce should never be considered. Unfortunately human weaknesses enter into the union, mainly the hardness of one’s heart (as Christ referred to), causing divorce to become too frequent of a reality. Because of these weaknesses, our Heavenly Father is allowing divorce to take place without rendering the full consequences of the action. Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the

Quorum of the Twelve Apostles counsels that divorced couples are permitted to remarry "without the stain of immortality specified in the higher law" (Elder Dallin H. Oaks, General Conference April 2007, "Divorce").

Those married in the temple are married both by civil law, as well as having a temple sealing under the spiritual law. When divorce takes place a couple can gain access to a civil divorce which dissolves the marriage legally. However, acquiring a sealing cancellation is another matter and only under "...a mandate of the president of the Church can the sealing of the couple be cancelled" (James A. Cullimore, "Q&A: Questions and Answers," New Era, Dec. 1975, 14-15).

Men are Too Often the Perpetrators

While divorce is between a man and a woman, all too often a husband may be the main perpetrator of the marriage issues that lead to divorce. Jesus Christ counseled his disciples that women are not to be treated unkindly or abused when he said "Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (Matthew 19:8-9).

Carefully Nurturing a Marriage is the Key

When marriage issues arise Christians are counseled to seek help from their ecclesiastical leaders. Because a marriage is sacred in the sight of the Lord, divorce is not part of a leader's counsel, but counsel on the consequences of divorce may be. Healing the core illness should be the goal of marriage counseling, which will undoubtedly include asking for the help of the almighty for healing and forgiveness. Christians are urged to do everything possible to nurture and protect their marriages including being helpful, kind, loving, considerate, attentive to each other's needs, and partners in all temporal and spiritual matters.

Dallin H. Oaks in his remarkable talk on divorce in 2007 urged the following to those contemplating divorce: "I strongly urge you and those who advise you to face up to

the reality that for most marriage problems, the remedy is not divorce but repentance. Often the cause is not incompatibility but selfishness. The first step is not separation but reformation. Divorce is not an all-purpose solution, and it often creates long-term heartache. If you are already descending into the low state of marriage-in-name-only, please join hands, kneel together, and prayerfully plead for help and the healing power of the Atonement. Your humble and united pleadings will bring you closer to the Lord and to each other and will help you in the hard climb back to marital harmony" (Elder Dallin H. Oaks, General Conference April 2007, "Divorce").

The prophet Spencer W. Kimball, in hopes of fending off marriage issues before they start, taught: "Two individuals approaching the marriage altar must realize that to attain the happy marriage which they hope for they must know that marriage . . . means sacrifice, sharing, and even a reduction of some personal liberties. It means long, hard economizing. It means children who bring with them financial burdens, service burdens, care and worry burdens; but also it means the deepest and sweetest emotions of all" (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball (2006), 194).

Divorce is not a Solution

In a talk referenced earlier, Dallin H. Oaks from April 2007 said "Even those who think their spouse is entirely to blame should not act hastily. One study found "no evidence that divorce or separation typically made adults happier than staying in an unhappy marriage. Two out of three unhappily married adults who avoided divorce reported being happily married five years later." Elder Oaks goes on to say: "A good marriage does not require a perfect man or a perfect woman. It only requires a man and a woman committed to strive together toward perfection."

Some churches allow for dissolution type processes (i.e. Catholic annulments, sealing cancellations, etc.). In these cases it is as if the couple was never married in the eyes of the church, freeing the couple to marry again without consequence. These decrees are difficult to obtain and require a good deal of time and effort in proving unusual circumstances on the part of one or both spouses. While

such a solution is preferable to divorce, the focus and priority should always be for the couple to turn to the Lord in working out their differences towards a brighter future together as a family.

Conclusion

It is important that all Christian churches place a significant emphasis on the preservation of marriage. This includes regular Sunday school classes, adult education, youth education, frequent conference and fireside talks on marriage, and an abundance of magazine articles and other media that discuss the virtues and importance of strengthening marriages. Churches should provide an environment where members are constantly counseled and taught the importance of marriage and how to nurture and preserve marriage on a daily basis.

Most Christian churches today are compelled, even required at the hand of the Lord, to speak out against divorce. Some churches will do this more than others, providing doctrines that oppose divorce and urge members to avoid such practice at all costs.

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