

I. Introduction

- A. We would all agree that the divorce-rate in our culture is way too high
 - 1. We can't agree on that rate (Article: "*Breaking Up is Hard to Count*")
 - a. **Crude:** Number of divorces per 1000 people (3.6 in 2017)
 - b. **Refined:** Number of divorces per 1000 married women (19)
 - c. **Ever-Divorced:** Percent of ever-divorced adult people (22%)
 - d. **Cohort:** Study demographic groups and trends to predict (42%)
 - 2. Differing ways to measure divorce leads to different conclusions
 - a. Divorce rate has actually gone down significantly in recent years
 - b. That's not because we're suddenly building stronger marriages
 - 1) It's because fewer people are getting marriage and marry later
 - 2) As loose as things are today, you can't get divorced if single
 - c. Sometimes we try to play one divorce rate off against another
 - 1) One article refuted 42% rate by just pointing to the 22% rate
 - 2) *Apples-n-oranges*. No matter how you measure it, it's too high
- B. Statistics also suggest there are factors that make divorce less likely
 - 1. Here are some mitigating factors that reduce likelihood of divorce
 - a. People who have parents who never divorce are 14% less likely
 - b. People with college degrees are less likely to divorce
 - c. Being previously divorced raises the change of getting another
 - d. Household income less than \$60K raises the chances of divorce
 - e. Having a child before marriage greatly increases the divorce rate
 - 2. One thing about those statistics— you can't do anything about them
 - a. What if your parents were divorced? Choose more carefully?
 - b. Had a child before marriage? Can't un-ring bell... or even want to
 - c. You can't exactly snap your fingers and make more than \$60K
 - d. Go get that college degree? Makes it harder to make that \$60K
 - 3. Those statistical correlations don't help us if we're already married

C. Our reading isn't about marriage... or is it? (**Read: Ephesians 4:11-13**)

1. The role of church leadership is laid out here as one of maturation
 - a. Christ gave the church certain leaders to help us grow in Christ
 - b. We don't have apostles today (*though I think Fred knew a couple*)
 - c. Church leaders are no longer prophets (*maybe in it for profit*)
 - d. I don't think we have evangelists today either, not in NT sense
 - 1) NT evangelists had apostolic authority over multiple church
 - 2) Timothy and Titus appointed elders... and confronted them
(*Is it coincidence that in same context he says, "drink a little wine?"*)
 - e. Church does have pastors and teachers (*some versions hyphenate*)
(*One of the qualifications/qualities is that elder is "must be able to teach"*)
2. **Point:** This teaching & equipping prepares church for TWO things—
 - a. **First**, we reach unity in the faith, topic he started with in **Eph 4:2**
 - b. **Second**, we reach maturity (*"whole measure of fullness of Christ"*)
 - 1) Isn't that what we want in our marriages? Unity and maturity?
 - 2) Isn't that what God wants for our marriages as well as church?
3. If we get to unity and maturity, then we can weather storm (**4:14-15**)
 - a. If our marriage is to weather the storm, we need unity & maturity
 - b. That comes from God, but we must put in the hard work as well

D. I'll make 5 suggestions on "*How to Divorce-Proof Your Marriage*"

1. **Caveat:** I'm talking to the married and those who want to be
 - a. The last thing I want to do is make divorced people feel worse
 - b. No need to lecture Adam and Even on apples after they ate one
 - c. Don't think I'm beating up on divorced; I'm beating up in married
2. **Caveat:** There's the danger of over-simplifying complex issues
 - a. Guy says to doctor, "*It hurts when I do this.*" Doc: "*Don't do that*"
 - 1) Like a preacher, "*Want your marriage to last? Don't divorce*"
 - 2) Offer platitudes and clichés to those who struggle isn't helpful
 - b. There's nothing easy or simple about having successful marriage
 - c. View these as conversation starters, not the last word on anything
3. I'll give five suggestions; there could be 25 things, but I want lunch

II. Five Ways to Divorce-Proof Your Marriage

A. **First**, realize in your heart-of-hearts that you COULD get divorced

1. Sometimes you hear advice, “*Never even see divorce as an option*”
 - a. Modified traditional vows, “*for as long as you both shall love*”
(*That’s not much of a contract, right? That’s more a campaign promise!*)
 - b. We should resolve not to see divorce as option AND live like it is!
2. If you think divorce is impossible, you start taking things for granted
 - a. Some Christians mistreat spouse verbally, emotionally, physically
 - b. But when their spouse starts talking of leaving, then they cry foul!
 - c. Hey, there were promises before the “*until death do you part*”
Do you take him/her to be your wedded husband/wife? Will you love, honor and cherish him/her for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health and forsaking all others, being faithful to him/her as long as you both shall live?
 - 1) You made promises to love, honor, and cherish, right?
 - 2) Want to divorce-proof marriage? Take those things seriously
 - d. Live like marriage depends on how well you treat spouse. It does.

B. **Second**, make sure you understand the real meaning of love

1. Not only does the Bible not stress romantic love, it wasn’t invented
 - a. I’m not talking about sex here; the Bible talks a lot about sex
 - b. I talking heart-thump, heart-throb, Hollywood, and Harlequin love
 - 1) It was invented by romantic poets/writers of the 18th century
 - 2) Here’s a quote from essay by Katherine Anne Porter (1940’s)
Romantic love crept into the marriage very stealthily, by centuries, bringing with it it’s absurd notions about love as an eternal springtime and marriage as a personal adventure meant to provide happiness
2. Romance is necessary– continue to date, take couples vacations, etc.
 - a. Seek to re-capture brief fragments of romantic love in marriage
 - b. Romance, while important, is far too brittle to provide a foundation
 - 1) Sick kid, 2:00 am feeding, money issues overwhelm romance
 - 2) Love that can holds up a marriage isn’t a feeling– it’s a VERB
3. Remember how Paul describes “*most excellent way*” (**1 Cor 13:4-7**)
 - a. Those are all things we do for one another– no mysterious feelings
 - b. Romance is great; nothing is sexier than being treated like this!

C. **Third**, make the first rule in your marriage the Golden Rule

1. We know the golden rule; doing it is the problem (**Matt 7:12**, MES)
 - a. Would you like to work full day & be expected to cook dinner?
 - b. If you did, would you think it fair to be expected to do dishes?
 - c. If you did, would it be fair if someone left a mess after snack
2. You like to live with self-absorbed jerk? Neither would your spouse
 - a. There's a lot of dirty jobs that someone has to do to make life work
 - 1) To share the beautiful stuff in marriage, you must share the dirty
 - 2) Lot has to do with not being fair and not selfish (**Phil 2:3-4**)
 - b. Best marriages are when BOTH try to do more than their share
3. **Related**: Be a cheerleader for your spouse. Make them appreciated
 - a. I remember one time I decided on my own to clean the house
 - b. Lynn came home, and stood there waiting for my accolades
 - 1) She did, "*No one cheers when I do all this... all the time*"
 - 2) She's right. She needs a cheerleader, and that would be me

D. **Fourth**, stay close enough your spouse to touch... often

1. NT never tells wives to do all cooking or husbands to mow the lawn
 - a. We work out most tasks; He's specific on one thing (**1 Cor 7:3-4**)
 - 1) **Context**: Greek idea that denying the body is more spiritual
 - 2) Some married decided to try celibacy– they weren't to do that
 - b. Sexual needs vary and change, but only one person can meet them
 - 1) That's the reason he uses the startling language of ownership
 - 2) That is not meant to override issues of consent or of mutuality
(*Sometimes what one of those mutually-owned bodies really needs is sleep*)
 - 3) What Paul hits at here is autonomy; one can't decide for other
2. But a related point; there needs to be a lot of non-sexual touch too
 - a. Touch should be a way to communicate affection and tenderness
 - b. Like in baseball, you get to first base a lot without getting home
 - 1) Someone suggested that you hold hands while arguing. Why?
 - 2) Touch communicates connection; we need much more of that

E. **Fifth**, make sure that God is front and center in your married life

1. We mentioned this in a previous lesson, but it bears repeating
 - a. Self-identifying Christians have divorce-rate at the national avg
 - b. Those who attend church regularly together have 35% less divorce
 - c. When they pray together and read scripture together, it's much less
 - d. If they are active in serving together at church and community...
2. Part of that is the shared common interest and the time together
 - a. But it is more than that. It is making your common interest God
 - b. It is spending time together working on the eternal things
 - c. Nothing you can do that will improve your marriage more
3. The song we sing says, "We bow down and crown You the King..."
 - a. If you really want your marriage to be all it can be, start there
 - b. Let this song encourage us all– married, single, widowed, divorced