Save the Marriage; Save the Child

Currently, in the United States alone, 51% of all first-time marriages end in divorce. This means that over half of all American couples split up and end their marriages. Today, far too many marriages do not last, and families are broken up. If it was as simple as husbands and wives deciding that they no longer loved one another and wanted to live the remainder of their lives apart, divorce would not pose much of a problem. However, life is not that simple. Every year, hundreds of children are exposed to and live with the trauma of watching their parents' relationship break apart. The negative impact of divorce on children is enormous, and the damage can last a lifetime. Therefore, the problem of divorce should be addressed with stricter laws that require counseling and make it much more difficult to divorce.

Requiring counseling and making it more difficult to get a divorce is a very good solution to the problem of rising divorce rates in America. First of all, if strong laws are passed, encouraging parents to stay married, the economic unit of the family will remain intact. Divorced mothers and their children will not be reduced to poverty. Second, if divorce is harder to obtain and the couple is encouraged to seek counseling, they will work on their relationship and their children will not be exposed to huge amounts of fighting and conflict. They will see that their parents have disagreements, true, but they will also witness their parents working hard to make the marriage stronger. Finally, and most importantly, keeping couples together by making divorce laws more strenuous reduces the emotional trauma that children feel when their parents split up. This trauma can last a child's lifetime and cause serious emotional damage.

Some people, however, do not agree with the solution of making divorce more difficult by passing stricter laws. They maintain that it is not necessary to force couples to stay married if the father takes financial responsibility for his former wife and their children. Nevertheless, too many divorced fathers, despite their good intentions to the contrary, fail to adequately support their children. A married couple forms an economic unit--a single unit. Together, they take responsibility for the financial well-being of the family. However, when this economic unit breaks up there is only one person (usually the mother) to take care of the family, and one person is usually not enough. Every year thousands and thousands of women and children are plunged into poverty when divorce breaks up the family. In fact, divorce is the number one cause of childhood poverty. Divorced women and their children learn what it is to do without and understand, first-hand, the terrible pain of poverty.

Another disagreement that people voice is that requiring counseling and creating stronger divorce laws force unhappy couples to stay together, thus intensifying the stress and unhappiness in the home. Also, these same people maintain that forcing couples to remain unhappily married is harmful to children. It is possible to divorce without conflict, thus minimize the effect on children. In reality, it is nearly impossible to divorce without conflict. When people marry, they promise to love one another and remain together for the remainder of their lives. If a couple can easily divorce, they break this fundamental, important promise. Breaking the marriage promise occasions tremendous fighting and conflict. Mild quarrels tend to grown into full-blown fights. A domestic war zone is not happy or emotionally healthy for adults and children. If couples are forced to remain committed to their marriages, and if laws require those who wish to divorce to seek counseling before they are allowed to divorce, the quarrels and fights will be much less frequent and more couples will stay together.

Finally, many people object to making divorce more difficult to obtain because they argue that divorce is so common that children are not harmed. All children have friends who are with divorced parents. They see that their friends are not harmed by divorce, so they learn that they will not be harmed either. Nevertheless, divorce causes children emotional trauma--trauma that can last the children's lifetime. Children of divorcing parents are worried and fearful, they are devastated because they no longer have daily contact with both parents. Many children feel anger and act out in uncharacteristic ways: using bad language, displaying anti-social behavior, using drugs, withdrawing from their long-time friends and once favorite activities. Many, many children establish bad behavior patterns during their parents' divorce, and these behavior patterns last until the end of their lives.

With the divorce rate at an all-time high in the United States, and divorce rates growing at an alarming pace all over the world, the issue of families caught in the turmoil of divorce is of concern to everyone. Few of have not, at one time or the other, been touched by divorce. If divorce is much more difficult to obtain and if couples who wish to divorce are requested to get counseling, the problem will be greatly reduced and children will not be traumatized and impoverished. Surely, no one can realistically imagine that divorce is a good thing. Divorce should be a rarity, not a commonplace occurrence. Thus, divorce laws should be much stricter and require that couples get counseling, making divorce much harder to obtain.