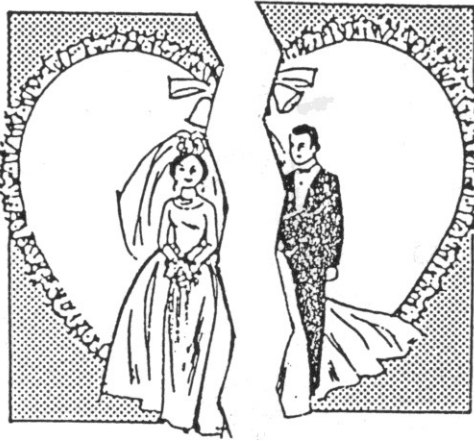


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Divorce And Remarriage:



Some Emotional Arguments Considered

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Where once upon a time, congregations of the Lord's church were, through a "like precious faith" (2 Peter 1:1) united in doctrine, we now see divisions. Where at one time, God's people stood firm in the support of plain Bible teaching, now many congregations "will not endure sound doctrine; but having itching ears will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth and turn aside unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

There are congregations of the church where the elders are no longer "holding to the faithful word" (Titus 1:9). There are those preachers, who in contrast to the apostle Paul, share responsibility in the loss of souls because they shrank from declaring the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26-27).

It cannot be denied that now, as much as ever before, we, the Lord's people, need to hear the exhortations of the Holy Spirit through the inspired writer:

"But speak thou the things which befit sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1).

"Hold the pattern of sound words ..." (2 Tim. 1:13).

"... Charge certain men not to teach a different doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:3).

This effort concerns itself with an issue that is quickly becoming a major source of division and conflict within the churches of Christ. Because divorce is commonplace in this modern age, few are the congregations which do not have to individually face the issue of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

Wherein lies the source of this conflict? The source of conflict lies with those who have married, and then contrary to God's Will, divorced, and remarried. These people, or someone close to them, are usually the ones who object the most to plain Bible teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. One faithful Gospel preacher, from his own experience writes,

Without exception, the objections come from those, or in be-

half of those, who have violated the Scriptures.¹

To those who read this work, we bring to your remembrance the words of our brother Paul who through inspiration asked, "So then, am I become your enemy, by telling you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16).

In Matthew 19:3ff, an important question was asked of Jesus by the Pharisees:

Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

Jesus answered plainly,

Have ye not read, that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female and said, FOR this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh? So that they are no more two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.

Oh, for hearts open to God's Will! If every young man and young woman contemplating marriage would take heed to Bible teaching on this subject of marriage, then we would not have to wrestle further with the issue of divorce and remarriage. God has always intended for one man to have one woman as wife for the duration of their lives! "Until death you do part" is meaningless to many couples united in marriage — but not to the Lord!

The Pharisees, in Matthew 19:7, ask Jesus another question,

Why then did Moses command to give her a bill of divorcement, and to put her away?

Jesus responds,

Moses for your hardness of heart suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it hath not been so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and

¹ Don W. Tarbet, *Christ's Marriage Law*, p. 1

shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery (Matthew 19:6, 9).

Such plain speaking would appear to be easily understood by the sincere student of the Word, but sadly, many wrest these Scriptures so as to lead souls astray from the sound doctrine. Jesus has stated the law of marriage which applies to you, me, Aunt Zany, Cousin George, the butcher, baker, and postman — Everyone! Divorce and remarriage is authorized by the Lord only if a spouse has been unfaithful through fornication. And then, we find authority only for the innocent party to remarry. Those who have married, divorced, and remarried without Scriptural authority are continuing in sin.

(A further technical treatment of this important subject may be found in publications listed in the Bibliography of this work.)

Objections

Consider with me some common objections that are frequently put forth at this point:

(1) "Christ's marriage law applies only to Christians."

Come now, we certainly will not be bold enough to change Christ's words in Mt. 19:9 when He sets forth the marriage law to all men/women by stating "Whosoever. . ." We find no restriction in God's Word which would make non-Christians exempt from Christ's marriage law. The context found in Matthew 19 is one in which Christ is speaking to unbelievers.² The teaching is UNIVER-SALLY ADDRESSED TO ALL MEN AND WOMEN.³

(2) "Baptism makes everything right; a person who enters into an otherwise wrongful marriage may continue in such after baptism without further sin."

The reason, logic, and Scripture behind such a widely held (but false) theory escapes me! Surely we believe that repentance is essential to salvation. Luke writes "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). Peter told the multitude on the day

² Jerry Moffitt, *Bale's Position Explained and Denied*, (Austin, 1982), p. 27.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

of Pentecost, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus unto the remission of your sins. . ." (Acts 2:38). Repentance certainly means more than "feeling sorry" for past sins. It involves a change of heart and life. A common illustration is applicable here:

- (A) A man steals a horse from a neighbor.
- (B) This horse thief later is converted and baptized.
- (C) His past sins are washed away.
- (D) Can he keep the stolen horse?
- (E) What should he do to make things right?

Here is another Illustration:

Consider with me Saul as described in Acts 8. He was indeed a persecutor of the Lord's church. We read of Saul's conversion in Acts 9. Could Saul (Paul) have continued to persecute Christians following his conversion? He neither wanted to, nor did he! Paul no longer participated in the sin of persecuting the church following his baptism because he had previously repented!

We present yet a third illustration borrowed from brother Roy H. Lanier, Sr.

Suppose a man is living in polygamy, and he decides to obey the Gospel. May he continue to live with a dozen wives after his repentance and baptism? Does his obedience to these commandments of the Gospel change his polygamy from unholy relations to holy relations? Polygamy is one form of adultery; living with a person who has been divorced from another for any cause except fornication is another form of adultery. If one may continue to live in one form of adultery after repentance and be pleasing to God, why may he not live in the other form of adultery after repentance and be pleasing to God?⁴

We thoroughly understand that baptism washes away sin

⁴ Roy H. Lanier, Sr., *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*, (Shreveport: Lambert Book House), p. 9.

(Acts 22:16). But, prior to baptism, one must repent of sins! In this particular case under consideration, repentance would involve a SEPARATION FROM ONE NOT SCRIPTURALLY YOUR MATE! True repentance in this instance would cause a change of both heart and life prior to baptism. Baptism does not change an adulterous union into a sanctified one.

(3) "Some people get their lives so messed up before becoming Christians that they may just have to go on and 'make the best of a bad situation.'"

A man once confronted me with this argument after I preached a lesson on Christ's marriage law. To him and others who make this emotional argument I reply: the best solution to a bad situation is God's solution. Jesus told a woman caught in the act of adultery ". . . go thy way; from henceforth sin no more" (John 8:11). The best (and only) solution to the problem of a life entangled with sin is to cease from sinning! Paul said,

The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent: inasmuch as he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness . . ." (Acts 17:30f).

Surely we can see this plain teaching in the Bible.

Men and women have for centuries "messed up" their lives by failing to take heed to God's Will. This particular issue is no different. Time and again we see the truth of such passages as Gal. 6:7, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Sin, we know, has terrible consequences — both spiritually and physically. Even though we are promised forgiveness according to the conditions God set forth, we still see that the physical effects of sin can be long-lasting and the cause of much heart-ache.

Consider the murderer: he may seek and obtain forgiveness from God, but his life may still be spent in prison. So it is with unscriptural divorce and remarriage. Sometimes children are born to this unholy union. Are the children to blame? No! Will the chil-

dren suffer if the parents repent and separate? Quite possibly, yes! Is this the fault of the preacher for teaching the truth? No! Is it God's fault? No! Is it the fault of that man and woman who disregarded God's Will in regards to marriage? Yes! Can they be forgiven? Yes. Will they still suffer from consequences of their past sin? As previously mentioned, they may very well suffer earthly consequences for a past, forgiven sin. This is why God so plainly warns that "your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23), and that we will reap the crop we have sown (Gal. 6:7-8).

(4) "But surely God does not desire to separate families over this issue."

Those who put forth this argument rely again on emotions alone, and certainly not the Scriptures. It is not God's fault that men and women have not followed His Will and consequently face terrible consequences of sin. Consider these words of the Lord and answer two questions.

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it (Matt. 10:37-39).

(A) To what extent must we love Christ? and (B) To what extent must we go to follow Christ?

In the 19th chapter of Matthew, we read in verses 16-22 of a young man with great possessions who "went away sorrowful" from Jesus because he had been instructed to do that which, in his particular case, was apparently difficult. I have in the past spoken with men and women who, even after being taught, and understanding the Will of God in regards to marriage divorce, and remarriage, were unwilling to change that which was amiss in their lives. They no doubt "went away sorrowful" because God's Word and the proper choice of action was clear, but they were unwilling to change even in this case where their soul's eternal abode was at stake. They were unwilling to give up sin for the

sake of Christ.

(5) "But I found* (*heard, talked with, read of, etc.) a preacher (**elder, deacon, Christian friend, etc.) who said that my divorce and remarriage was okay."**

Does God say it is okay? This is the important question! No doubt we have all heard of a preacher or elder who has departed from "sound doctrine" to teach that which is popular but unscriptural. When we blindly follow that taught without comparing it with Bible teachings on the subject, we are indeed susceptible to every wind of false doctrine, and we will be misled. Don't let anyone tell you that sin is not sin, or that sin will go unpunished. That is essentially what Satan told Eve centuries ago (Gen. 3:4)! Listen to God! Study His Word! Follow His Word! If a preacher says that which is in harmony with God's Word, then accept it. If, however, any man teaches that which, after study, you find to be contrary to Scripture, please — for your soul's salvation — reject it!

What Should We Do?

Now, we consider the question, "What should be the course of action for congregations faced with this issue?"

1. The truth must be preached and taught. One elder, speaking on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, recommends that the issue be dealt with at least yearly in both Bible classes and from the pulpit.⁵ Paul told Timothy to preach the word. . . " (2 Tim. 4:2). This means the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) and will entail preaching when the message of the Lord is convenient and when it is not so convenient; when it is readily received and when it is not; when people are practicing righteousness and "when they will not endure sound doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:3).

Faithful Christians who teach the truth regarding divorce and remarriage have been scorned and rejected by some individuals, congregations, even elders and preachers. But if souls are to be saved in that Great Day, we must "take heed" to ourselves and our teaching (1 Tim. 4:16), and we must "reprove, rebuke, and

⁵ Robert S. Bell, "Growing in Doctrinal Soundness," *Grow Up In All Things*.

exhort with all long-suffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2).

Plain Bible instruction needs to start from youth up. We need to teach and emphasize the importance of God's Will in this matter to all ages and it is further apparent that this subject, as well as other Bible teachings, needs to be addressed repeatedly — in the home, the Bible class, and from the pulpit. By so doing, we may prevent so much heartache as is common when people disregard God's Will. Further, souls will be saved as a result of such sound teaching.

2. We must follow God's instructions in this, and all matters.

Some elderships and congregations have shamefully refused to follow God's Word in restoring those overtaken in sin (Galatians 6:1), seemingly hoping that if the problem (sin of adultery) is ignored, it will "magically" go away.

Elders are to watch in behalf of our souls (Hebrews 13:17), and to "tend the flock of God which is among you" (1 Peter 5:2.). There will be times when elders will have to make necessary inquiries and perhaps even withdraw from those who refuse to repent.⁶ God grant us elders who will follow the admonition directed to bishops: "holding to the faithful word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able both to EXHORT IN THE SOUND DOCTRINE AND TO CONVICT THE GAINSAYERS (Titus 1:9).

Paul gave specific commands in dealing with fornication in the church (Read 1 Cor. 5:1-13). We certainly cannot improve on the inspired directive in this matter: "... I wrote unto you not to keep company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator . . . with such a one, no not to eat" (1 Cor. 5:11). And then in verse 13 of the same chapter we read, "Put away the wicked man from among yourselves." Two purposes behind church discipline can readily be seen; (1) To save the soul of the one(s) overtaken in sin (1 Cor. 5:5), and, (2) to prevent unchecked sin from influencing the church (1 Cor. 5:6).

One elder said to me, "All we can do is teach and leave the decisions up to the man and woman." Certainly we must, as already

⁶ Max Hamrick, *From the Beginning It Hath Not Been So*, (Dallas: Milbryan Foundation), p. 8.

stated, teach the truth in this matter, and, certainly, the final decision to repent can only be made by the parties involved in sin. But we must take every Bible-commanded step to restore one, who after being taught and admonished, still refuses to repent. "Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump even as ye are unleavened" (1 Cor. 5:7). God has spoken — may we take heed to His words.

Brethren, we shall all one day stand before our Creator to answer for that which we have done and said in this life. In view of this Great Day, may we all prayerfully examine God's Will for us. If our lives are not in harmony with His Word, may we all have the desire and the character to repent.

But exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called today, lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. . . (Heb. 3:13).