

EAST
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CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Lesson 21

Practical Problems in Divorce and Remarriage

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. God's design is for oneness, not division between two married people. God's common blessing comes upon all men who seek to hold their marriages together and God's special blessing comes upon all Christians who honor Christ in their marriages.
- B. God's ideal is no divorce; however, we do not live in an ideal world because of sin. There are many practical problems that come up, especially in our society where divorce is an accepted practice as a solution to marital problems. These problems must be dealt with on Biblical principles or common sense.

II. LOCAL CHURCH PROBLEMS

- A. Church Officers (Elder or Deacon)
 1. Introduction: Can a divorced and/or remarried man be a church officer? Scripture clearly states that an elder (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6) and a deacon (I Tim. 3:12) can only be "the husband of one wife." This is by no means an easy problem and good men disagree over the issue. There are at least five interpretations given to the meaning of the phrase "the husband of one wife." Our only source for discovering the meaning of this phrase is the Word of God.
 2. View #1: Prohibits That a Church Officer Be Married: This is the Roman Catholic interpretation, for they say that the "wife" is the Church. A priest marries the church and stays single.
 3. View #2: Prohibits the Single State (Celibacy) for the Officer of the Church. This view says that a man must be married to be a church officer. Objection: The Apostle Paul was not married, yet he was an Apostle and the leader of the Gentile churches in the New Testament.
 4. View #3: Prohibits Infidelity: A church officer must be true to one wife. Certainly fidelity to one wife is included in this phrase but there is more than just fidelity.
 5. View #4: Prohibits Successive Marriages (One wife in a lifetime). Support:
 - a. The elder or deacon's life should be higher than the average Christian. He should be "above reproach" (1 Tim. 3:2). He should also have self-control in food, drink, possessions, temper, sex drives, etc. A church officer must hold the ideal and be a man whose position is less open to criticism than others. While God may forgive for divorce, sometimes men never do, and they constantly throw it up to Christians in leadership. Therefore, for the sake of testimony, a divorced man should not hold a church office.
 - b. This may seem a little harsh but it must be remembered that men suffer the effects of sin in themselves and before the world even after they are saved.

NOTE: An alcoholic may receive forgiveness of sin in Christ, but even after he is saved he may die of cirrhosis of the liver, which was simply the historical effects of his sinning ways.

- c. The book of First Timothy seems to support one wife in a lifetime, for in 1 Tim. 5:9, it states that a widow should not be taken into the care of the church unless she is sixty years old and the wife of one husband. If she had a second husband, she would not need to be supported by the church.
- d. Pauline theology supports this view (1 Cor. 7:8; 7:32-40). Paul's whole point is that an unmarried person can serve the Lord in more freedom because he or she is not bogged down with the cares of the world. If a church officer's mate dies, it would be better not to remarry (although it would be permissible to do so).
- e. Many of the early church fathers held this view.
- f. Many modern commentators take this view.
- g. This view is the plain simple meaning of the sentence. It is the first thing a person thinks when he reads this section.
- h. If one holds no divorce and no remarriage, then this viewpoint would be consistent with other teachings of the Bible.
- i. Note: Some hold that the only exception to "the husband of one wife" is if the wife dies and the man remarries. If this is the case, then he is free to hold a church office.

OBJECTIONS

- a. If a husband of one wife is taken literally, then this must mean that a single person cannot be a church officer or a man whose first wife dies cannot be a church officer. If any exception is admitted then there may be the possibility that this verse forbids polygamy.
- b. If Paul is teaching one wife in a lifetime, why didn't he explain it?
- c. One wife in a lifetime makes an artificial standard between a church officer and the ordinary believer.
6. View #5: Prohibits Polygamy (One wife at a time):
 - a. The Greek actually means "one kind of a woman man," indicating faithfulness to one woman. It cannot be definitely proven that this means "one woman only."
 - b. Pauline theology states that it is permissible to remarry under certain conditions (1 Cor. 7:10-24; 1 Tim. 5:5:14; Rom. 7:3; 1 Cor. 7:39). These exceptions, plus the exception of adultery as taught by Christ, should be applied to all Christians, not making a church officer someone who is a little holier than the average Christian.
 - c. Roman history tells us there was much polygamy even though it was against the law in New Testament times and this would have been a problem for the early church.
 - d. Many of the late church fathers held this view.
 - e. What about salvation? If a man was divorced before becoming a Christian, should this be held against him? Is the sin of divorce worse than any other sin?
 - f. There may be some cases in which a man was true to his wife but she committed adultery. He was truly the innocent party. Does he have to suffer because of his wife's sin?

6. Conclusion: The view that the phrase “the husband of one wife” means one wife only (or one wife only except if the wife dies) is by far the safest view to take, for practically it has less repercussions or complications. However, the meaning of “the husband of one wife” may be “one wife at a time.” If so, this may allow a divorced person under certain limited conditions to hold a church office. If so, this decision would have to be made by a thorough examination of all the facts by a church court made up of the elders.
- B. Church Discipline: Divorce becomes a matter of church discipline when two professing Christians in a local church get a divorce. The elders should do all they can to hold the marriage together but if the divorce comes, then it must be dealt with accordingly. If there is a Biblical basis for the divorce, then the elders must do all they can to help the individuals rehabilitate. If there is no Biblical ground for the divorce and there is no repentance, then the couple should be removed from the church roll, barred from the communion and asked to leave the assembly.
- C. Church Instruction: A divorced person may teach in a local assembly, providing he or she has been approved by the elders.

III. SOCIAL PROBLEMS

- A. Things to Consider Before Filing for Divorce: Much thought and prayer should be given before divorce is undertaken. Divorce has traumatic effects upon the two partners in the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual realms. Divorce always leaves permanent scars and cynics about marriage.
 1. Husband
 - a. A man loses the comfort and security of his home, and must take up the rigorous task of being a bachelor (cook, dishwasher, housecleaner, loneliness, abundance of time, etc.) and setting up separate housing.
 - b. A man usually loses custody of his children, for the courts almost always award the children to the mother. The man may also lose the respect and affection of his children.
 - c. A man may also lose financially, for the cost of a divorce can be devastating. Alimony and/or child support can cripple his finances for years. A man must ask himself whether he can afford a divorce.
 - d. A man may find that a divorce will hinder his business or profession.
 - e. A man will most certainly lose some friends, for in marital breakups, people tend to take sides.
 2. Wife
 - a. A woman suffers greatly from a divorce, for it affects her mentally and emotionally because of the guilt of failure.
 - a. A woman suffers terribly because of loneliness. A man has his work to fall back on; a woman usually does not.
 - b. A woman must become the breadwinner for her family and must do the work of a man (discipline of children, fixing the plumbing, repairing cars, etc.).
 - c. A woman usually must go to work to support the family. She comes home dead tired and cranky. She operates on much guilt because of the way she acts towards her children.

- d. A woman usually gets a stigma because she is a divorcee. People judge her or consider her to be a “sexual pushover.”

3. Children

- a. Children suffer the most in a divorce. Little do parents realize the effects that divorce has on their children. The only security a child really has is his parents, and if they divorce, the child may become bitter and rebellious. He cannot understand why this had to happen to him. Many a child has sobbed himself to sleep because two people he loves have failed him miserably by getting a divorce. Divorce usually produces insecure and unstable children who cannot cope with life effectively. NOTE: Children of divorced parents are more likely to be candidates for divorce when they marry than children of non-divorced parents. Why? Children of non-divorced parents have a model to follow.
- b. Children are forced to take sides between their parents in a divorce and this causes tremendous emotional problems. NOTE: Some psychiatrists and medical doctors feel children of divorced parents may do better psychologically if they are removed from the bickering and infighting of incompatible parents who are living together but show no love. This may be true, but divorce or parental squabbling are both sin and damaging to children.

B. Things to Consider Before Marrying a Divorcee

1. You may well inherit children who are not your own. It is much easier to love and cope with your own children than someone else’s children.
2. You may have contact with the divorcee’s husband or wife because of the children. This can produce jealousy.
3. If a wife, you may have a large portion of your husband’s income going out each month for alimony or child support. This could easily lead to much resentment, especially if your own family needs the money.
4. You may be marrying a person who is basically unstable and could not make a marriage work.
5. You may have to live with the stigma of marrying a divorcee, especially in circles where divorce is looked upon as sin.
6. You will have a difficult time explaining to your children the reason for your divorce.
7. You will marry a person who has been to some degree psychologically damaged because of a divorce. There will be difficult times of adjustment.
8. You may be marrying a person who has had many sexual affairs with the opposite sex as a divorcee which may make it difficult for the divorcee to settle down with one person.
9. Conclusion: Scripturally a divorcee under certain circumstances can remarry (cf. Lessons #18, 19, 20). Certainly the new birth can make a person a new creature in Christ and give the foundation to establish a sound marriage in Christ. There have been some divorced persons who have been able to make a second marriage work. However, it must be remembered that there are historical effects of sin from a divorce and those who wish to marry a divorcee should do so cautiously and with their eyes wide open. NOTE: It may be wise for a divorcee to marry another divorcee in Christ because both would be aware of the pitfalls of this kind of a

marriage.