

5-1-1957

A Biblical Study of the Divorce Problem

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A BIBLICAL STUDY OF THE DIVORCE PROBLEM

by

Nathan Krampitz

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the

Western Evangelical Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Divinity

Portland 22, Oregon

May, 1957

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

I. THE PROBLEM AND PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The minister has a complex task. He is a preacher, teacher, counsellor, and pastor. Part of his work is to perform marriages. In doing this he is often asked to perform marriages where one or both parties are divorcees. He needs to decide then whether or not he will marry them. This is not an easy decision to make.

Most churches have an official ruling for the denomination. But many ministers do not adhere to this official ruling. There are also differences in the official positions which the churches take. Since there is so much confusion in the matter of remarrying divorced persons, the problem of this thesis is to seek an answer to the question: Is there any Scriptural basis for the remarriage of divorced persons?

II. JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Our nation has a high divorce rate. In 1950 the rate based on per 1000 population was as follows: In the U.S.A.: marriages, 11.1, divorces, 2.6; in Washington: marriages, 14.5, divorces, 4.7; in Oregon: marriages, 7.4, divorces, 3.9; in California: marriages, 7.5, divorces, 3.7. In 1954 the rate was as follows: In the U.S.A.: marriages, 9.2, divorces, 2.4; in Washington: marriages, 11.4, divorces, 3.3; in Oregon: marriages, 5.8, divorces, 3.7; in California:

marriages, 6.2, divorces, 3.4.¹

In 1956 in Clackamas county, Oregon, there were 374 marriage licenses issued and 304 divorces granted.²

This is a high divorce rate. The permanence of marriage is threatened. Since the church has always been closely associated with marriage this is a matter of vital importance to ministers.

Because of the high divorce rate, there are many divorcees who come to pastors asking to be remarried. What shall the pastor do? Is the pastor able to remarry them, or is he disobeying God's commandments if he remarries them.

This question has been a matter of concern to the writer who is preparing to be a minister. In talking with ministers it was discovered that many have not arrived at a clear answer to this problem. This study has been made to discover what the Bible teaches with reference to this problem of remarrying divorced persons.

III. ASSUMPTIONS

It is assumed that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and is the final authority for all moral and religious conduct of men. In this thesis the quotations from the Bible are taken from the American Standard Version (1901) of the Holy Bible.

¹United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1956 (Seventy-seventh edition, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1956), p. 76.

²Information issued by the Clackamas County Clerk to the writer.

IV. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Marriage. Marriage as used in this thesis is the union of one man and one woman into a relationship which is not only physical, but also a spiritual and mystical union.

Divorce. In this thesis indicates a final legal severance of the marriage union.

Adultery. Adultery is used to designate voluntary sexual intercourse by a married man with one other than his wife or by a married woman with one other than her husband.

Fornication. Fornication has two meanings. Generally it refers to illicit sexual intercourse on the part of an unmarried person. Sometimes it is used to refer to any illicit sexual intercourse. In this study when the word fornication is used it is used to indicate any illicit sexual intercourse.

Desertion. The abandonment of the wife or husband by the mate is referred to as desertion in this thesis.

Innocent party. The innocent party in this thesis refers to the person who is free from blame or guilt when the marriage relationship is broken by adultery.

Biblical Standard. The Biblical Standard for remarrying divorced persons is defined as follows: The pastor will remarry persons who have been divorced on grounds of adultery or desertion provided they are the innocent party.

V. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study is organized in the following way.

In Chapter II the official position regarding the remarriage of divorced persons of five denominations is presented. The denominations are: The Congregational church, the Baptist church, the Lutheran church, the Presbyterian church, and the Methodist church. The effect of the ecclesiastical organization of each denomination on the remarriage practice is noted.

Chapter III is a survey of the practices followed by selected ministers of the five denominations studied in Chapter II. Five general practices were followed by the ministers. Some would not marry any divorcees. Some followed what they regarded as the Biblical standard. Some remarried the innocent who had been divorced on other than the Biblical standard. Some remarried the guilty if they showed evidence of establishing a satisfactory home. Finally, some married any who came to them.

In Chapter IV there is a short study of the ideal marriage relationship. Then four specific Bible passages which deal with the problem of divorce and remarriage of divorced persons are studied. The passages are: Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Matthew 5:31-32, Matthew 19:3-8, and I Corinthians 7:12-16. Finally, Biblical principles which relate to the problem of the remarriage of divorced persons are considered.

In Chapter V four Biblical examples of God's attitude toward those who have broken the marriage relationship are examined. The examples which are examined are David and Bath-sheba, Herod and Herodias, the Samaritan woman, and the woman taken in adultery. The second part

of this chapter is a study of the difficulties faced by the pastor in applying the Biblical principles to actual situations.

Chapter VI contains the Summary and Conclusions.

CHAPTER II

THE OFFICIAL POSITION OF FIVE DENOMINATIONS REGARDING THE
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The official position of five specific denominations is considered in this chapter. The denominations studied are the Congregational, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist.

I. THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Since each one of the Congregational churches is self-governing, there is no set rule for the whole denomination. Each local church has its own rules and regulations which it follows. This pertains to the remarriage of divorcees, also. Each minister of each local church has to make the decision whether or not he will remarry the divorcees.

There is, however, in the Congregational church a national council known as The National Council of the Congregational Churches of the United States. This council makes recommendations to the local Congregational churches, but does not have the authority to enforce them. In the past years it has made a number of recommendations regarding the divorce problem. Dr. J. P. Lichtenberger, Professor of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, in his book Divorce summarizes them as follows.

The committee was appointed in 1895 to report at the next National Council its judgment as to the correct scriptural doctrine of divorce.

The essential features of the report were:

"The divorce treated in this report is divorce a vinculo matrimonii—divorce from the bond of matrimony—or such divorce as permits one by law to put away husband or wife, and be married to another person.

"I am of the opinion that there is no existing Scripture doctrine of divorce other than that stated by the Saviour in Matt. xix: 1-9."

This report was accepted, and in addition a minority report was also accepted which among other suggestions, contained the following:

"I would respectfully suggest a single further practical step.

"It is that our pastors be invited to follow, so far as they can, some principle of Christian comity in acting upon applications for the celebration of the marriage of persons who could not be married under the rules of the Church to which they belong, and therefore, apply to our ministers for the service."

The following appears in the Minutes of 1901:

"1. We view with serious misgivings the alarming increase in divorces and the consequent deplorable result in domestic and social life.

"We regard the purity and unity of the family as cornerstones of Christian homes and Christian civilization.

"2. We do not question the propriety of solemnizing the marriage of a party who has been shown to be innocent in divorce proceedings, but we urge upon the ministers the duty of withholding sanction from those whose divorce has been secured on other than Scriptural grounds.

In 1907, after endorsing the Inter-Church Conference on Marriage and Divorce, the following action is recorded:

"We express our detestation for frivolous divorce, and we urge our ministers to make strict inquiry, in the case of strangers or of divorced persons applying to them for marriage, to discern whether, under the laws of morality and charity, they are worthy of entering again into that relation from which they may once have been severed."

No further action was taken until 1919 at which time the following resolution was adapted.

"Whereas, the breaking up of an alarming large number of American homes is indicated by the fact that America leads the Christian Nations of the world in the ratio of divorce to marriage:

"Be It Resolved! That the Council urges ministers so to work and teach that membership in the Christian Church shall be a guarantee of conscientiousness and intelligence about the duties of home life.

"Be It Further Resolved! That we urge upon our ministers increased care in the scrutiny of the records of divorced people seeking remarriage.¹

The position of the Congregational church generally then is this:

¹J. P. Lichtenberger, Divorce (New York: Whittlesey House, 1931), p. 239.

1. The Scripture doctrine of divorce is stated by the Saviour in Matt. 19:1-9; 2. Ministers may remarry persons who are the innocent parties in divorce proceedings but are urged to withhold sanctions from those whose divorce has been obtained on other than Scriptural grounds; 3. Ministers are to carefully counsel with those divorcees who come to them for marriage to discern whether they are worthy of entering again into the marriage relationship.

II. THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

There are a number of Lutheran bodies in the United States. Frank S. Mead, in his book, Handbook of Denominations, states the following concerning the Lutheran church.

In spite of their organic division there is real unity among American Lutherans; it is a unity based more upon faith than upon organization. All Lutheran churches represent a single type of Protestant Christianity. Their faith is built upon Luther's principle of justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ; it centers in the gospel for fallen men. The Bible is the inspired Word of God and the infallible rule and standard of faith and practice. Lutherans confess their faith through the three general creeds of Christendom, the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian, which they believe to be in accordance with the Scriptures. They also believe that the unaltered Augsburg Confession is a correct exposition of the faith and doctrine of Evangelical Lutheranism. The apology of the Augsburg Confession, the two catechisms of Luther, the Schmalkald Articles, and the Formula of Concord are held to be a faithful development and interpretation of Evangelical Lutheranism and of the Bible.¹

From the above it is seen that the Lutheran faith and practice is based on the Bible. They confess their faith through three creeds, the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian. The Augsburg Confession, the two Catechisms of Luther, the Schmalkald Articles, and the formula of

¹Frank S. Mead, Handbook of Denominations (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), p. 115.

Concord are held to be a faithful development of interpretation of Evangelical Lutheranism and the Bible. It is from these sources that one finds their teaching on the divorce question.

Concerning the question of divorce, Luther's Catechism states, "God forbids the breaking of the marriage vow by unfaithfulness or desertion. He permits the innocent party to procure a divorce when the other party is guilty of fornication."¹

In a recent interview with the Rev. Charles Felton, the pastor of Concordia Lutheran Church in Oak Grove, Oregon, the Rev. Felton stated that Lutheran pastors in the past have remarried the innocent party of a divorce where the divorce has been obtained on grounds of fornication or willful desertion.²

Mueller and Hartshorne in their book, Ethical Dilemmas of Ministers, stated the following:

The Lutheran Church has always attempted to base its practice in this matter upon Scriptural teaching. As recently as 1930 the Biblical principle of divorce only on grounds of "adultery and malicious desertion" was reiterated by the Church in Convention.³

It has been observed that although there are a number of branches of the Lutheran church, all subscribe to the same faith and practice. Concerning the problem of the remarriage of divorcees,

¹A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943), p. 70.

²F. F. Mueller & Hugh Hartshorne, Ethical Dilemmas of Ministers (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 34.

³Quotation from Rev. Charles Felton, Pastor Concordia Lutheran Church, Oak Grove, Oregon, in personal interview with the author, February 21, 1957.

Lutheran ministers may remarry the innocent parties where divorce has been obtained on the grounds of adultery or willful desertion.

III. THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The form of church government in the Presbyterian church is somewhat different than that of the Congregational and Lutheran churches. In the Presbyterian church in the U. S. A. there is a body known as the General Assembly. This General Assembly is described by Mead as follows:

The highest judiciary of the church is the annual general assembly, made up of clerical and lay delegates elected by the presbyteries on a proportional basis. The general assembly settles all matters of discipline and doctrine referred to it by the lower bodies, establishes new synods, appoints boards and commissions, and reviews all appeals. Its decisions are final, except upon matters affecting the constitution of the church.¹

The Presbyterian church has a Constitution which is composed of the Confession of Faith, The Large and Shorter Catechism, The Form of Government, The Directory for the Worship of God. In this Constitution is found the official teaching of the Presbyterian Church on the divorce question. The Constitution states the teaching on divorce as follows:

Adultery or fornication, committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract. In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce, and after the divorce to marry another, as if the offending party were dead.

¹Mead, op. cit., p. 151.

Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments, unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage; yet nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage: wherein a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills and discretion in their own case.¹

Concerning the Presbyterian church, Lichtenberger in his book, Divorce reports that the General Assembly adopted the following resolution in 1925.

That the General Assembly reiterate with emphasis the deliverance of the General Assembly of 1905 concerning divorce, namely, 'that ministers should refuse to marry divorced persons, except the innocent party in a case where the divorce has been granted on Scriptural grounds, not then until assured that one year has elapsed from the date of the decision allowing the divorce.'²

It may be concluded that it is the official position of the Presbyterian church to remarry only the innocent party in the case where the divorce has been granted on Scriptural grounds.

IV. THE BAPTIST CHURCH

The Baptist church in the U. S. A. is composed of numerous separate groups. Concerning the Baptists, Frank S. Mead stated the following.

While they differ in certain minor details, they are generally agreed upon the following principles of faith: the inspiration and trustworthiness of the Bible as the sole rule of life; the lordship of Jesus Christ; the inherent freedom of the individual to approach God for himself;

¹The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. (Philadelphia: The Publication Department of the Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1930), p. 101.

²Lichtenberger, op. cit., p. 224.

the granting of salvation through faith, by way of grace and contact with the Holy Spirit; two ordinances--the Lord's Supper and baptism of believers by immersion; the independence of the local church.¹

Each local church in the Baptist church is independent and self-governing. The Bible is the sole rule of life. Concerning the problem of divorce the writer has had difficulty finding a definite statement. Edward T. Hiscox's The New Directory for Baptist Churches was consulted. This is the guide for the Northern Baptist Church. Then F. M. McConnell's Manual for Baptist Churches was consulted. This is the manual for the Southern Baptist Churches. Neither of these manuals has information on the divorce problem. The writer then called the Portland office of the Oregon Baptist Convention of the American Baptist Convention. The secretary informed him that there is no official statement concerning divorce and the remarriage of divorcees for the Baptist churches because each local church is self-governing.

Since each Baptist church is self-governing and the Bible is the sole rule of faith and practice in each local church, each minister applies the Scriptures which refer to the problem at hand. Therefore, in the question of the remarriage of divorcees, there is no set rule. Each minister deals with each individual case as it comes to him. He considers the case in the light of Biblical teaching and makes his decision on the basis of his findings.

V. THE METHODIST CHURCH

The form of church government in the Methodist church is

¹Mead, op. cit., p. 27.

episcopal. Mead stated the following concerning the Methodist church.

The general conference is the lawmaking body of the church, meeting quadrennially; the bishops preside, and the work of the conference is done largely in committees, whose reports when adopted by the general conference become Methodist law.¹

The Methodist law is contained in the publication known as The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church. Concerning the re-marriage of divorcees, the Methodist Discipline has the following statement:

No minister shall solemnize the marriage of a divorced person whose wife or husband is living and unmarried; but this rule shall not apply (1) to the innocent person when it is clearly established by competent testimony that the true cause for divorce was adultery or other vicious conditions which through mental or physical cruelty or physical peril invalidated the marriage vow, nor (2) to the divorced persons seeking to be reunited in marriage. The violation of this rule concerning divorce shall be considered an act of maladministration.²

Therefore, according to the Discipline, ministers in the Methodist church may remarry the innocent party where the true cause for divorce was adultery, or other vicious reasons which through mental or physical cruelty invalidate the marriage vow. This is the ruling which has been enacted by the General Conference of the Methodist Church and is part of Methodist church law.

Summary. In this chapter the official position of five denominations in regard to the remarriage of divorcees has been considered. A number of interesting facts have been pointed out in this study.

¹Mead, op. cit., p. 132.

²Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1948), p. 107.

The Congregational church follows these principles: (1) The Scriptural doctrine of divorce is stated by the Saviour in Matthew 19:1-9. (2) Ministers may remarry persons who are the innocent parties in divorce proceedings but are urged to withhold sanctions from those whose divorce has been obtained on other than Scriptural ground. (3) Ministers are to carefully counsel with those divorcees who come to them for marriage to discern whether they are worthy of entering into the marriage relationship.

The Lutheran church follows this principle that Lutheran ministers may remarry the innocent parties where divorce has been obtained on the grounds of adultery or willful desertion.

The official position of the Presbyterian church is to remarry only the innocent party in the case where the divorce has been granted on Scriptural grounds.

Since each Baptist church is self-governing and the Bible is the sole rule of faith and practice, there is no set rule for the whole denomination to follow. Each local minister deals with each individual case as it comes to him. He considers the case in the light of Biblical teaching and makes his decision on the basis of his findings.

Ministers in the Methodist church may remarry the innocent party where the true cause for divorce was adultery or other vicious reasons which through mental or physical cruelty invalidated the marriage vow.

Comparison. When the five denominations are compared it may be observed that the official position regarding the remarriage of

divorcees is very similar. The ministers of the Congregational, the Lutheran, the Presbyterian and the Methodist churches may remarry the innocent party where the divorce has been obtained on grounds of adultery.

The ministers of the Baptist church are to follow the Biblical teaching on the divorce question, but these Biblical teachings are given to the individual ministers to interpret, therefore, a number of practices may be followed by Baptist ministers.

Since each local Congregational church is self-governing, the local minister need not follow the dictates of the National Council of Congregational Churches in the United States, but this National Council strongly recommends withholding sanctions from those whose divorce has been obtained on other than Scriptural grounds.

Lutheran and Presbyterian ministers may remarry the innocent person where the marriage has been broken by willful desertion.

Methodist ministers may also remarry the innocent party of a divorce where the divorce was caused by vicious conditions which through mental or physical cruelty or physical peril invalidated the marriage vow. This rule is found only in the Methodist church.

These are the official positions of the five denominations. There is great similarity among them in their official position, but as it will be observed in the next chapter there is a wide difference in the practices followed by the ministers of these five denominations.

Each denomination bases its position of the remarriage of divorcees on the Biblical teaching, yet there is some difference in the

positions of the various denominations. Because of these differences in practice a careful study is made in the following chapters of the Scriptural teachings in an effort to find a solution to this problem.

CHAPTER III

THE PRACTICE OF MINISTERS IN REMARRYING DIVORCED PERSONS

Lutheran. The graduates from Auburn are Presbyterian. The graduates from Colgate-Rochester are Baptist. And the graduates from Drew are Methodist.

I. EXPLANATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

In the questionnaire which the minister received from Mueller and Hartshorne they were asked to give the practice which they followed regarding the remarriage of divorced persons. The results showed that five general practices were followed: 1. None. 2. Biblical. 3. Innocent other than Biblical. 4. Guilty. 5. Any. The meaning of each classification is described by Mueller and Hartshorne as follows:

1. None: "I do not marry any divorced persons."
2. Biblical: "I marry persons who have been divorced on grounds of adultery and desertion (Biblical) only, provided they are the innocent parties."
3. Innocent other than Biblical: "I marry persons who have been divorced on other than Biblical grounds if they are the innocent parties."
4. Guilty: "I marry the persons alleged to be the guilty parties if I have the evidence that leads me to believe they would establish a satisfactory home."
5. Any: "I marry any divorced persons who come to me."¹

A further explanation given by Mueller and Hartshorne of "Innocent other than Biblical" is ministers will remarry the innocent party where the marriage has been broken by such things as cruelty or incompatibility.²

II. RESULTS OF SURVEY

Practice Followed by Graduates of Bangor Theological Seminary

¹Ibid., p. 20.

²Ibid., p. 23.

Hartford Seminary Foundation, Yale University Divinity School (Congregational). The following was reported by Bangor graduates: 2% would not remarry any divorcees; 11% followed the Biblical standard; 25% remarried the innocent party of a divorce where the divorce had been obtained on other than Biblical grounds; 51% remarried the guilty; and 12% would remarry any divorcees who came to them.¹

The following was reported by the Hartford graduates: 2% would not marry any divorcees; 7% followed the Biblical standard; 34% remarried the innocent on other than Biblical grounds; 48% remarried the guilty; and 9% would remarry any divorcees who came to them.²

The following was reported by Yale graduates: 5% of the graduates would not marry any divorcees; 8% followed the Biblical standard; 26% remarried the innocent on other than Biblical grounds; 47% remarried the guilty and 14% remarried any who came to them.³

If an average of the three Congregational seminaries is taken the following results for the practice followed by the Congregational ministers is obtained: 4% would not remarry any divorcees; 8 2/3% followed the Biblical standard; 28 1/3% remarried the innocent on other than Biblical grounds; 48 2/3% remarried the guilty; and 11 2/3% remarried any who came to them.

Hartshorne and Mueller reported that the ministers who followed this practice gave the following argument for their action:

¹Ibid., p. 20.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Those who follow this procedure consider the matter of innocence and guilt as being unimportant. The vital issue, as they see it, is whether or not the attitude and purpose of the persons are such as to insure a successful second marriage. The groups feel that the view is realistic and based upon concern for human values.¹

Second highest (28 1/3%) was the practice of remarrying the innocent party of a divorce where the divorce had been obtained on other than Biblical grounds. One minister who reported in the survey expressed his feelings this way.

I carry it further than adultery. There are such things as cruelty and incompatibility and there is such a thing as being the innocent party in such a divorce. You can't possibly live with a crank. If I know what lies behind the divorce and the people who are before me to be married look as though they might make a go of the marriage, I will marry them.²

Only a small percentage (8 2/3%) of the Congregational ministers followed the Biblical standard. The ministers who followed the practice of remarrying the guilty, when they are willing to make a success of their second marriage, felt that this is a better way than strictly adhering to the Biblical standard.

The Congregational ministers of this survey are: (1) high in the practice of remarrying the guilty who are willing to make a success of their second marriage; (2) high in practice of remarrying the innocent person whose divorce has been obtained on other than Biblical grounds; (3) low in the practice of strictly adhering to the Biblical standard.

Practice followed by Lutheran Theological Seminary (Gettysburg) and Lutheran Theological Seminary (Mt. Airy). The following was

¹Ibid., p. 26.

²Ibid., p. 23.

reported by the Gettysburg graduates: 50% followed the Biblical standard; 36% remarried the innocent other than Biblical; and 14% remarried the guilty.¹

The following was reported by the Mt. Airy graduates: 1% would not remarry any divorced persons; 58% followed the Biblical standard; 32% remarried the innocent on other than Biblical grounds; 7% remarried the guilty; and 1% would remarry any divorcees who came to them.²

The average for these two Lutheran seminaries gives the following results: $\frac{1}{2}$ % would not remarry any divorcees; 54% followed the Biblical standard; 34% remarried the innocent persons on other than Biblical grounds; $10\frac{1}{2}$ % remarried the guilty; and $\frac{1}{2}$ % would remarry any divorced persons who came to them.

The majority of the Lutheran ministers followed the Biblical standard. They would remarry the innocent party of a divorce where it had been obtained on grounds of adultery or willful desertion. Lutheran ministers were second highest (34%) in following the practice of remarrying the innocent on other than Biblical grounds. Only $10\frac{1}{2}$ % would remarry the guilty party and only $\frac{1}{2}$ % would remarry any divorced persons who came to them.

Practice Followed by Graduates of Auburn Theological Seminary (Presbyterian). The following was reported by the Auburn graduates: 3% would not marry any divorcees who came to them; 30% followed the Biblical standard; 40% remarried the innocent parties of a divorce

¹Ibid., p. 20.

²Ibid.

where the divorce had been obtained on other than Biblical grounds; 22% remarried the guilty if they showed evidence that they would establish a satisfactory home; and 5% would remarry any who came to them.¹

The Presbyterian ministers, graduates of Auburn, were highest in following the practice of remarrying the innocent persons of a divorce where the divorce had been obtained on other than Biblical grounds. 40% of them followed this procedure. 30% of the Presbyterian ministers followed the Biblical standard of remarrying the innocent party of a divorce where the divorce had been obtained on grounds of adultery or willful desertion. 22% remarried the guilty if they showed evidence that they would establish a satisfactory home. Only 5% would marry any who came to them. Thus a total 70% of the Presbyterian ministers followed the practice of marrying the innocent party of a divorce where the divorce had been granted either on Biblical ground or other than Biblical grounds.

Practice Followed by Colgate-Rochester Divinity School (Baptist).

The following was reported by the Colgate-Rochester graduates: 3% would not remarry any divorcees; 22% followed the Biblical standard; 33% remarried the innocent party of a divorce where the divorce had been obtained on other than Biblical grounds; 23% remarried the guilty party of a divorce if they showed evidence of establishing a satisfactory home; and 19% would remarry any divorcees who came to them.²

¹Ibid. ²Ibid.

The highest percentage of the Baptist ministers followed the practice of remarrying the innocent party of a divorce where the divorce had been obtained on other than Biblical grounds (33%). Next followed the practice of remarrying the guilty party if they showed evidence of establishing a satisfactory home. Twenty-three percent of the Baptist ministers followed this practice. Following closely was the practice of following the Biblical standard with 22% of the Baptist ministers following this procedure, and a large percentage, (19%) remarried any that came to them.

Practice Followed by Graduates of Drew Theological Seminary (Methodist). The following was reported by the Drew graduates: 6% would not marry any divorcees; 44% followed the Biblical standard; 36% remarried the innocent party of a divorce where the divorce had been obtained on other than Biblical grounds; 11% remarried the guilty if they showed evidence of establishing a satisfactory home; and only 3% would remarry any who came to them.¹

The highest percentage of the Methodist ministers followed the Biblical standard; 44% followed this practice. Next highest was the practice of remarrying innocent persons of a divorce whose divorce had been obtained either on Biblical grounds or other than Biblical grounds. Only 11% would remarry the guilty and only 3% would remarry any divorcees who came to them. Thus a total of 80% of the Methodist ministers followed the practice of remarrying the innocent persons of a divorce whose divorce had been obtained either on Biblical grounds or other

¹Ibid.

than Biblical grounds.

Summary. Congregational ministers who are graduates of Bangor, Hartford and Yale, reported the following practice:

- 4% would not remarry any divorcees.
- 8 2/3% followed the Biblical standard.
- 28 1/3% remarried the innocent persons who had been divorced on other than Biblical grounds.
- 48 2/3% remarried the guilty if they showed evidence of establishing a satisfactory home.
- 11 2/3% remarried any divorcees who came to them.

Lutheran ministers who are graduates of Gettysburg and Mt. Airy reported the following practice in remarrying divorced persons.

- 1/2% would not remarry any divorcees.
- 54% followed the Biblical standard.
- 34% remarried the innocent persons who had been divorced on other than Biblical grounds.
- 10 1/2% remarried the guilty if they showed evidence of establishing a satisfactory home.
- 1/2% remarried any divorcees who came to them.

Presbyterian ministers who are graduates of Auburn reported the following practices in remarrying divorced persons.

- 3% would not remarry any divorcees.
- 30% followed the Biblical standard.
- 40% remarried the innocent persons who had been divorced on other than Biblical grounds.
- 22% remarried the guilty if they showed evidence of establishing a satisfactory home.
- 5% remarried any divorcees who came to them.

Baptist ministers who are graduates of Colgate-Rochester reported the following practice in remarrying divorced persons.

- 3% would not remarry any divorcees.
- 22% followed the Biblical standard.
- 33% remarried the innocent persons who had been divorced on other than Biblical grounds.
- 23% remarried the guilty if they showed evidence of establishing a satisfactory home.
- 19% remarried any divorcees who came to them.

Methodist ministers who are graduates of Drew reported the following practice in remarrying divorced persons.

- 6% would not remarry any divorcees.
- 44% followed the Biblical standard.
- 36% remarried the innocent persons who had been divorced on other than Biblical grounds.
- 11% remarried the guilty if they showed evidence of establishing a satisfactory home.
- 3% remarried any divorcees who came to them.

Comparison of the Practices Followed by the Ministers of the Five Denominations. In the practice of not remarrying any divorcees

Methodist	6%
Congregational	4%
Presbyterian	3%
Baptist	3%
Lutheran	$\frac{1}{2}\%$

In the practice of following the Biblical standard, the ministers of the five denominations are classified in this order.

Lutheran	54%
Methodist	44%
Presbyterian	30%
Baptist	22%
Congregational	8 2/3%

In the practice of remarrying the innocent party who had been divorced on other than Biblical grounds, the ministers of the five denominations are classified in this order.

Presbyterian	40%
Methodist	36%
Lutheran	34%
Baptist	33%
Congregational	28 1/3%

In the practice of remarrying the guilty party if they showed evidence of establishing a satisfactory home, the ministers of the five denominations are classified in this order.

Congregational	48 2/3%
Baptist	23%
Presbyterian	22%
Methodist	11%
Lutheran	10 1/2%

In the practice of remarrying any divorced person who came to them, the ministers of five denominations are classified in this

order.

Baptist	19%
Congregational	11 2/3%
Presbyterian	5%
Methodist	3%
Lutheran	1/2%

Comparison of the Practices of Ministers With the Official Regulations of Their Denomination Regarding the Remarriage of Divorcees.

In Chapter II it was noted that the Congregational and Baptist churches have no official statement regarding the remarriage of divorcees which can be enforced on each local minister, but each local minister must make his own decision. The survey in Chapter III has shown that Congregational ministers have the highest percentage (48 2/3%) following the practice of remarrying the guilty persons of a divorce who show evidence of establishing a satisfactory home. The Baptist ministers are second with 23% following this practice. The Baptist ministers are highest (19%) in following the practice of marrying any who come to them. The Congregational ministers are second with 11 2/3% of them following the practice of remarrying any divorcees who come to them. The action of the Congregational and Baptist ministers has shown that where there is no official rule which can be enforced upon each local minister only a small percentage (Baptist 22% and Congregational 8 2/3%) will follow the Biblical standard, even though theoretically they subscribe to it.

In Chapter II it was noted that the Lutheran church has always attempted to base its practice regarding the remarriage of divorcees

upon Scriptural teachings. In Chapter III it was pointed out that 54% of the Lutheran ministers follow the Biblical teaching. Therefore, even though each local Lutheran church is self-governing, the Lutheran ministers hold very closely to the Lutheran doctrinal position as taught in Luther's Catechism.

The Methodists have an official statement in their Discipline which permits them to remarry the innocent party of a divorce where the divorce has been obtained on grounds of adultery or other vicious reasons. The survey in Chapter III states that 80% of the Methodist ministers follow this practice. Therefore, the Methodist ministers follow the official ruling of the Discipline of the Methodist church quite closely. On the other hand 14% did not follow the Discipline and would remarry the guilty or any who came to them.

Finally in comparing Chapters II and III it may be concluded that although the churches may state an official position there are a large number of ministers who will deviate from the official position, consider each individual case, and make their decision on basis of their findings. An example of this is the fact that 22% of the Presbyterian ministers will remarry the guilty party if there is evidence that they would establish a satisfactory home.

Therefore, even though the churches may state an official position many ministers seem to feel that a hard and fast official church ruling is not the answer to the problem of the remarriage of divorcees.

CHAPTER IV

A STUDY OF THE BIBLICAL TEACHINGS WHICH REFER DIRECTLY
TO THE PROBLEM OF DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

CHAPTER IV

A STUDY OF THE BIBLICAL TEACHINGS WHICH REFER DIRECTLY TO THE PROBLEM OF DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

In order to get a proper background for the Scriptural teachings on divorce, the Scriptural teaching on marriage was briefly considered. The subject of marriage was not studied intensively but only briefly to discover the ideal marriage relationship, as taught in the Scriptures.

Then, the Scriptural teaching on divorce and the remarriage of divorced persons was considered. Because the Scriptural teachings on divorce are so closely related to the problem of the remarriage of divorced persons they cannot be separated from each but must be studied together.

Finally, Biblical principles which can be applied to the problem of the remarriage of divorced persons are considered.

I. SCRIPTURES DEALING WITH GOD'S BASIC PLAN FOR MARRIAGE

The first Old Testament teaching for marriage as it should be ideally is found in Genesis 2:24: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."¹

In this portion of Scripture three things are shown regarding the marriage relationship. First, a man shall leave father and mother. It means that there is a breaking of the ties with parents. Many

¹Genesis 2:24, American Standard Version.

marriages in this day are wrecked because father and mother have not been left. Many a person is still tied either physically or mentally to his father or mother.

Second, he shall cleave unto his wife. He shall adhere to his wife. His first loyalty is to his wife.

Finally, they shall be one flesh. They are not two, but one. Marriage is a union of two individuals. It is a physical, spiritual and mystical union. Such a union can only be terminated by death.

Jesus in the New Testament period repeated what marriage should be ideally. Mark records the words of Jesus as follows:

6. But from the beginning of the creation, Male and female made he them.
7. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife;
8. and the two shall become one flesh: so that they are no more two, but one flesh.
9. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.¹

Jesus was so careful to emphasize that what God had joined together was not to be separated by man. This ideal marriage union is one which no man has the right to dissolve. Only death can terminate this marriage union. This is the ideal marriage relationship as instituted in the beginning and as Jesus said it should be.

II. SCRIPTURES DEALING WITH DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

DIVORCED PERSONS

The Scriptures dealing with divorce which are discussed in

¹Mark 10:6-9, American Standard Version.

this chapter are found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Matthew 5:31, 32; Matthew 19:3-8; and I Corinthians 7:12-16.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4. John Murray in an article entitled "Divorce" found in The Westminster Theological Journal has said the following concerning Deuteronomy 24:1-4:

This passage occupies a unique place in the Old Testament because it contains, as no other passage in the Old Testament, specific legislation bearing upon the question of divorce. The references to this passage in both Testaments confirm the significance that attaches to it in the Old Testament economy (cf. Is. 50:1; Jer. 3:1; Matt. 5:31; Matt. 19:7,8; Mark 10:3-5).¹

This important passage as found in the American Standard Version reads as follows:

1. When a man taketh a wife, and marrieth her, then it shall be, if she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some unseemly thing in her, that he shall write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.
2. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife.
3. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, who took her to be his wife;
4. her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before Jehovah: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which Jehovah thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.²

Some casual readers might mistake the purpose of this law thinking that it made divorce mandatory in the case of the unseemly thing. But this was not true. David W. Amram in his book The Jewish Law of Divorce stated the purpose of the passage as follows:

¹John Murray, "Divorce," The Westminster Theological Journal November, 1946, IX, p. 32.

²Deuteronomy 24:1-4, American Standard Version.

The purpose of this law was to prevent the remarriage of a divorced woman to her first husband after she had been "defiled" by a second marriage.¹

It would be an abomination for a divorced woman to remarry her first husband. This law was given to prevent it. John Murray in his article entitled "Divorce" gives a number of comments of scholars on the construction of these four verses.

The comment of C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch brings out this construction very clearly: "In these verses. . . divorce is not established as a right; all that is done is, that in case of a divorce a reunion with the divorced wife is forbidden, if in the meantime she had married another man, even though the second husband had also put her away, or had died. The four verses form a period, in which vers. 1-3 are the clauses of the protasis, which describe the matter treated about; and ver. 4 contains the apodosis with the law concerning the point in question." S. R. Driver says with reference to this passage: "The red. of A. V., R. V., is not here quite exact; v. 1-3 form the protasis, stating the conditions of the case contemplated, v. 4 is the apodosis." To the same effect is the comment of Joseph Reider: "The chief concern of the law is to prevent remarriage after divorce. Consequently vv. 1-3 must be construed as the protasis and v. 4 alone as the apodosis."²

Thus if in construction of this passage verses 1-3 is considered as the protasis and verse 4 as the apodosis, the true meaning of this passage can be understood more easily.

John Murray elaborated further on how this construction effects the purpose of this Scriptural passage.

These observations with respect to construction are of primary importance because they show that this passage does not make divorce mandatory in the case of the indecency or un-

¹David W. Amram, The Jewish Law of Divorce (Philadelphia: Edward Stern & Co., Inc., 1896), p. 30.

²John Murray, op. cit., p. 35.

cleanness concerned. It is not even to be understood as encouraging or advising men to put away their wives in such a case. Neither is it to be understood as an authorizing or sanctioning of divorce. It simply provides that if a man puts away his wife and she marries another man the former husband cannot under any conditions take her again to be his wife. There is nothing, therefore, in this passage itself to warrant the conclusion that divorce is here given divine approval and is morally legitimated under the conditions specified.¹

Thus, one may conclude that this passage did not make divorce mandatory, nor did it authorize or sanction divorce, but simply stated that a divorced woman was not to remarry her first husband after she had been married to another.

This passage also mentioned the bill of divorcement. Since the bill of divorcement is mentioned in other places it will be beneficial to consider it more fully. Amram in his book, The Jewish Law of Divorce, treated the matter of the bill of divorce or "get" quite fully. But for the purpose of this study the following characteristics of the bill of divorce are stated: (1) It was mandatory in case of dismissal; (2) It was a legal document; (3) It served as a protective measure for the women who had been divorced. Regarding the bill of divorce John Murray has stated:

We may conclude that the bill of divorcement was required by positive enactment in all cases of divorce and was therefore in the category of precept or requirement. This should be borne in mind, as it may bear very closely upon the interpretation of the New Testament passages.²

Thus the bill of divorcement was an important factor in the Jewish Law.

¹Ibid., p. 36.

²Ibid., p. 39.

There is some question as to what was meant by the "unseemly thing" mentioned in Deut. 24:1. There are a number of reasons why it could not have referred to adultery. The penalty for adultery was death. (Lev. 20:10, Deut. 22:22). The Mosaic law made provision for a test if adultery was not proved (Numbers 5:11-31). It also had laws concerning virgins who had been forced. Thus, it seems that every situation of adultery was covered and in none of them was the bill of divorcement mentioned. Thus the "unseemly thing" must have referred to something else.

The Revised Standard Version (1952) translates the unseemly thing as "some indecency." John Murray agreed with this translation. He seemed to feel that the unseemly thing was something shameful and offensive which gave the husband legitimate grounds for divorce.¹

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 teaches the following things: (1) The divorced wife could not go back to her first husband if her second husband had divorced her or died. (2) The husband was required to give the wife a bill of divorcement if he divorced her. (3) The unseemly thing does not seem to refer to adultery but to some indecency.

Matthew 5:31, 32. Matthew 5 is the first place in the New Testament where the divorce problem is mentioned. Matthew 5 is part of the Sermon on the Mount. In chapter 5 Jesus made several pronouncements which began with, "Ye have heard that it was said." Then Jesus continued, "But I say unto you." Here Jesus is not destroying the law but rather is fulfilling it, according to Matthew 5:17, "Think

¹Ibid., p. 42.

not I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill (Matt. 5:17).

One of the pronouncements which Jesus made concerning divorce is found in Matthew 5:31, 32 which reads as follows:

- 31 It was said also, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:
 32 but I say unto you, that every one that putteth away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, maketh her an adulteress: and whosoever shall marry her when she is put away committeth adultery.¹

Concerning this text, John Murray in his article entitled "Divorce" said the following:

Before undertaking to discuss the express teaching of this text it is well to bear in mind that there are two subjects closely germane to this whole question of divorce on which this text does not reflect. First, the text deals exclusively with dismissal or divorce on the part of the man; what rights may belong to the woman in the matter of suing out a divorce are not intimated. Secondly, Jesus says nothing here with respect to the question of the remarriage of the man who puts away his wife for the cause of fornication.²

This text does not teach anything concerning the woman's right of divorce or the question of the remarriage of the man who puts away his wife for the cause of fornication.

This text seems to have an allusion to Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The requirement of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was that if a man divorced his wife he was required to give her a bill of divorcement.

The teaching of Jesus in this text is: 1. The cause of fornication is the only grounds for divorce; 2. If a man puts away his

¹Matthew 5:31,32, American Standard Version.

²John Murray, "Divorce," The Westminster Theological Journal May, 1947, IX, p. 184.

wife for any other reason he makes her an adulteress; 3. And, whoever marries one who is put away save for the cause of fornication commits adultery.

In the discussion of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 it was noted that adultery was to be punished by death, but here Jesus said that a man may divorce his wife if she commits adultery. Seemingly Jesus made a change. Concerning this change John Murray says:

Here then is something novel and it implies that the requirement of death for adultery is abrogated in the economy Jesus himself inaugurated. There are accordingly two provisions which our Lord instituted, one negative and the other positive. He abrogated the Mosaic penalty for adultery and he legitimated divorce for adultery. In this very distinctly appears that original legislative authority that pertained to our Lord and it is perhaps the most conspicuous concrete instance of the exercise of that authority in the sermon on the mount.¹

According to John Murray, Jesus abrogated the Mosaic death penalty for adultery and legitimated divorce for adultery.

A summary of the teaching found in Matthew 5:31,32 is: 1. Fornication is the only legitimate reason for divorce; 2. A man that puts away his wife for any other cause than fornication makes her an adulteress; and 3. A man who marries a woman illegally divorced commits adultery.

Matthew 19:3-9. The teaching concerning divorce in this text was given in answer to the questions of the Pharisees. The Pharisees came to Jesus and attempted to trap him. They had tried to trap him on other occasions using various issues. This time they were using

¹Ibid., p. 191.

the divorce problem as a trap to ensnare Jesus.

Matthew 19:3-9 reads as follows:

3. And there came unto him Pharisees, trying him and saying, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?
4. And he answered and said, Have ye not read, that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female,
5. 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?
6. So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.
7. They say unto him, Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorcement, and to put her away?
8. He saith unto them, Moses for your hardness of heart suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it hath not been so.
9. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery.¹

The question the Pharisees asked was this: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" Jesus answered them by stating the ideal marriage relationship as God had ordained it in the beginning. This marriage was not to be put asunder by man. Then the Pharisees asked, "Why did Moses command to give a bill of divorcement and to put her away?" Jesus answered them that Moses did not command them to put away their wives, but he suffered or allowed them to divorce their wives. Moses did this because of their hardness of hearts, but from the beginning it was not so.

Verse 9 repeats the teaching of Matthew 5:32 but adds to it a teaching concerning the remarriage of the man who puts away his wife except for fornication. If this man has put away his wife for any

¹Matthew 19:3-9, American Standard Version.

cause except fornication and marries another, he is committing adultery.

A summary of the teachings found in Matthew 19:3-9 is: 1. A repetition by Jesus of the ideal marriage relationship as ordained by God in the beginning. 2. Moses did not command the men to divorce their wives but allowed divorce because of their hardness of hearts. 3. Verse 9 repeats the teaching of Matthew 5:32 and adds that the man who puts away his wife for any other cause except fornication and marries another, commits adultery.

I Corinthians 7:12-16. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul is answering a number of questions which the church there asked him (I Corinthians 7:1). The questions dealt with the local situation in Corinth at that particular time. One of the questions which Paul answered was concerning non-Christian mates who had left their Christian mates.

I Corinthians 7:12-16 reads as follows:

12. But to the rest say I, not the Lord: If any brother hath an unbelieving wife, and she is content to dwell with him, let him not leave her.
13. And the woman that hath an unbelieving husband, and he is content to dwell with her, let her not leave her husband.
14. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the brother: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy,
15. Yet if the unbelieving departeth, let him depart: the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us in peace.
16. For how knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O husband, whether thou shalt save thy wife?¹

A number of facts are taught in this text of Scripture. If a

¹I Corinthians 7:12-16, American Standard Version.

brother had an unbelieving wife and she chose to remain with him he was not to leave her. If the Christian wife had an unbelieving husband and he chose to remain with her, she was not to leave him. The unbelieving mate was sanctified in the believing mate.

If the unbelieving mate departed then the believing mate was not under bondage. There are those who feel that Paul meant that they were free to remarry. The churches whose official position is to permit the remarriage of the innocent party where the divorce has been obtained on grounds of desertion base their position on this Scripture.

There are others however, who feel that this is an erroneous view and take an opposite position. C. Caverno writing in The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia is one who took an opposite view. He stated the following:

But Paul has not said in that verse or anywhere else that a Christian partner deserted by a heathen may be married to someone else. All he said is: "If the unbelieving departeth, let him depart: the brother or the sister is not under bondage (dedoñlōtai) in such cases: but God hath called us in peace." To say that a deserted partner "hath not been enslaved" is not to say that he or she may be remarried. What is meant is easily inferred from the spirit that dominates the whole chapter, and that is that everyone shall accept the situation in which God has called him just as he is. "Be quiet" is a direction that hovers over every situation. If you are married, so remain. If unmarried, so remain. If an unbelieving partner deserts, let him or her desert. So remain. "God hath called us in peace." Nothing can be more beautiful in the morals of the marriage relation than the direction given by Paul in this chapter for the conduct of all parties in marriage in all trials.¹

Caverno definitely felt that the wife or husband was not free to remarry if they had been deserted by their unbelieving mate. There

¹C. Caverno, "Divorce," The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), II, 806.

is thus a conflict in opinion and there is not enough evidence to make a decision either way.

In verse 16 Paul is careful to point out to the believing mate that he or she was not to leave their unbelieving mate because there was always the possibility that their unbelieving mate might be saved.

In summary, this text teaches: 1. The Christian husband should not leave his unbelieving wife; 2. The Christian wife should not leave her unbelieving husband; 3. The unbelieving mate was sanctified by the Christian mate; 4. If the unbelieving mate left, the believing wife or husband was not under bondage; 5. There was always the possibility that the unbelieving mate would be saved, therefore, it was the duty of the believing mate to remain with the unbelieving mate.

III. BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES WHICH RELATE TO THE PROBLEM OF REMARRIAGE OF DIVORCED PERSONS

Previously in this chapter the Scriptural teachings dealing directly with the problem of divorce and the remarriage of divorced persons were studied. These give some light on the problem under consideration in this thesis. Is there any Biblical grounds for the remarriage of divorced persons? But the Bible also states principles which can be applied to the problem of the remarriage of divorced persons.

A number of these principles which are relative to the problem of the remarriage of divorcees are now considered.

God is merciful. This principle is brought out very forcefully in the Bible. The following Bible verses tell of God's mercy.

The Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. (Exodus 34:7.)

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. (Psalms 103:8.)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (I Peter 1:3.)

Yes, God is merciful. He is a just God but His justice is tempered with mercy.

God forgives sin. One of the cardinal facts of Christianity is that God will forgive the sinner if he confesses his sins and asks for forgiveness. The following Scriptures substantiate this principle:

Come now, and let us reason together, saith Jehovah: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. (Isaiah 1:18.)

And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep mine ordinances, and do them. (Ezekiel 36:25-27.)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (I John 1:9)

God forgives the sinner if the sinner meets the conditions of God.

Sin leaves its mark. Though God forgives the sinner of the sins, sin leaves its mark upon the sinner. Though the sins were forgiven many of the scars of a life of sin remain. The man who has lived for years as a drunkard and then is saved, still bears the scars of his past life upon his body.

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7-8.)

These principles which have to do with God's attitude toward the sinner and sin obviously have definite bearing on the problem of remarrying divorced persons. This is further considered in the next chapter of this thesis. In summary these principles are as follows:

1. God is merciful.
2. God forgives the sinner if the sinner meets the conditions for forgiveness.
3. Though the past sins are forgiven, sin leaves a scar upon the sinner.

These are three principles which relate to God's attitude toward sin, including the sin of adultery.

Summary. In this study of the Biblical teachings dealing directly with the problem of divorce and the remarriage of divorced persons a number of important principles were noted.

1. Marriage is a divinely ordained union of a man and a woman who leave their father and mother and cleave to each other. No man has the right to break this union. Only death can terminate it.

2. Divorce was given to the people by Moses because of the hardness of their hearts. Moses did not command the men to divorce their wives, but suffered or allowed them to do so.

3. Jesus taught that the only grounds whereupon a man could divorce his wife was adultery. If he put her away for any other reason he caused her to commit adultery. If any man married the woman who was illegally divorced, he committed adultery. If the husband remarried after illegally divorcing his wife, he committed adultery.

4. Paul taught that the Christian mate was not to leave his unbelieving mate. There was always the possibility that the unbelieving mate might be saved. But if the unbelieving mate left, the Christian mate was not under bondage.

In the study of the Biblical principles which relate to the problem of the remarriage of divorced persons, these three principles are considered: 1. God is merciful. 2. God forgives the sinner if the sinner meets the conditions. 3. Though the past sins are forgiven, sin leaves a scar upon the sinner.

Conclusion. On the basis of these Scriptures which deal directly with divorce and the remarriage of divorced persons it may be concluded: 1. That the ideal marriage relationship was not to be broken by divorce. "What God hath joined together let not man put asunder." 2. Because of sin and the hardness of man's heart the provision for divorce was made. 3. The only Scriptural ground for divorce is fornication. 4. Unless a divorce has been obtained on the grounds of fornication the divorced person who remarries is living in adultery and the one who marries the divorced person is living in adultery.

CHAPTER V

APPLICATION OF BIBLICAL TEACHINGS TO THE PROBLEM OF
REMARRYING DIVORCED PERSONS

CHAPTER V

APPLICATION OF BIBLICAL TEACHINGS TO THE PROBLEM OF REMARRYING DIVORCED PERSONS

In Chapter IV it was noted that the only Scriptural grounds for divorce is adultery. The innocent party who has obtained a divorce or has been divorced on these grounds can remarry. This only answers part of the problem for the pastor who is faced with the problem of remarrying divorced persons. He still faces the problem of knowing what to do when one who is guilty in the matter of divorce desires to be remarried.

Perhaps even a more difficult problem is that of determining guilt in the matter of divorce. The matter of guilt raises two questions. 1. To determine whether either party was innocent when the divorce was granted or if they were both guilty to a certain extent. 2. To determine whether a guilty party has been forgiven by God and if so what should the attitude of the minister be in the matter of remarrying such a person.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part an examination is made of four Biblical instances where God's attitude toward unfaithfulness in the marriage relationship is disclosed. In the second part there is discussed the difficulties faced by the pastor and the principles which he may follow in remarrying divorced persons.

I. SCRIPTURAL EXAMPLES EXAMINED

Throughout the Scriptures as in Hosea 5:3,4 God frequently com-

pare the unfaithfulness of His people to that of unfaithfulness in the marriage relationship. There are four instances where God's attitude toward unfaithfulness in the marriage relationship is disclosed. These are now examined.

The Example of David. The story of David and Bath-sheba is recorded in II Samuel 11 and 12. David had committed adultery with Bath-sheba and then had her husband, Uriah killed. In doing this he broke both the sixth and the seventh commandments. (Exodus 20:13,14) But God through the prophet Nathan convicted David of his sins. David confessed his sins and God forgave him (Psalms 51).

David had to pay the penalty for his sin. The first child born to Bath-sheba and David died. But later Solomon was born to them.

The blessing of God rested upon the union of David and Bath-sheba. After David had confessed his sins and God had forgiven David his sins, David and Bath-sheba were permitted to live together as husband and wife.

This instance illustrates the truth that God does forgive one who has committed adultery if he or she is repentant and asks for forgiveness. Then too, God did not require them to separate. He permitted them to live together as husband and wife and blessed their union which began in violation of God's commandments.

The Example of Herod and Herodias. In Matthew 14 is recorded the accusation of John the Baptist against Herod. Herod had taken Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for his own wife. He had broken the commandment of God and was actually, according to the law of God,

living in adultery with Herodias.

Herod had committed sin. But both he and Herodias continued to live in their sin. They did not repent and ask God to forgive them. It is against the commandment of God to commit adultery. But because Herod did not repent but continued to live on in his sinful way, John the Baptist condemned him so severely.

This incident is an illustration of the truth that where there is no genuine repentance there is no forgiveness. God will forgive only when the sinner repents of his sin and asks for forgiveness. While it is true that Herod listened to John's preaching, there is no evidence that he ever repented of his adultery and hence one may conclude that he was not forgiven.

The Example of the Samaritan Woman at Jacob's Well. This incident is recorded in John 4:3-42. Jesus met this woman at Jacob's well and engaged her in a long conversation. This woman was an adultress. She had had five husbands and the one with whom she was then living was not her husband. (John 4:17-18)

Jesus saw the need of this woman and dealt with her accordingly. He was ready to meet this need. He promised her living water if she would but ask for it. (John 4:10) Jesus was ready to forgive her her sin if she but asked for forgiveness.

From the fact that the woman did acknowledge her adultery and from the record of her witnessing it seems evident that she did confess her sins and receive forgiveness. There is no record of her life after this incident but enough is said to indicate that Jesus was ready to forgive her sin and to give her living water. Here again God's

attitude toward the repentant sinner who has committed adultery is disclosed. God is ready to forgive the one who has committed adultery if they ask for forgiveness.

The Example of the Woman taken in Adultery. In John 8:2-11 is recorded the incident of the woman taken in adultery. There are some ancient manuscripts which do not record this incident, but there are others which do, and it seems to be in harmony with the rest of the teachings of Jesus.

This woman had been taken in the act of adultery. She was guilty and according to the law of Moses she was to be stoned. The Pharisees brought her to Jesus to test His loyalty to the law of Moses. But Jesus did not condemn her to be stoned. Instead he said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." (John 8:7) When all her accusers had left without casting a stone, Jesus did not condemn her either, but forgave her of her sins. "Jesus said, Neither do I condemn thee: go thy way; from henceforth sin no more." (John 4:10)

It seems that in this instance Jesus recognized the validity of the law of Moses when He asked the one who was without sin to cast the first stone. The fact that her accusers left makes it evident that they were guilty. No attempt was made to deny that the woman was guilty of adultery. Whether she was an innocent victim or was truly repentant is not stated. But it is evident that the attitude of Jesus toward her was that of forgiveness. If this record may be accepted as valid then it is clear that there are conditions under which God does forgive the sin of adultery.

II. DIFFICULTIES FACED BY THE PASTOR

One of the difficult problems that the pastor has to face in re-marrying divorced persons is in regard to the innocent party. It is simple to say that the innocent party of a divorce where the marriage was broken by adultery is free to remarry. But it is not always simple to establish who the innocent party really is.

There may be the possibility that the innocent party drove the guilty party to commit adultery. How is the pastor to know whether the innocent party is completely innocent? Is it the duty of the pastor to be a trial lawyer or a judge to establish who the innocent party is? Or should the pastor take the word of the one who comes to him asking to be remarried without investigating?

Another difficulty concerns a couple who has led a worldly life. They never had been living a genuine Christian life. In their worldly condition they entered into a marriage union which ended in failure. The marriage ended in divorce. Later one of them becomes a Christian. He or she meets another Christian person. They become attracted to one another and eventually grow to love one another. Can the pastor marry them, or is this person required to remain unmarried the rest of his or her life. This problem arises more than once.

Another matter which has to be taken into consideration is the former marriage. How will this second marriage affect the partner of the former marriage. How will it affect the children of the former marriage. In some of the tangled situations which arise this can be a very real problem.

How is the pastor to meet these and other problems which arise? This is a situation which needs to be prayerfully and diligently considered.

As previously noted marriage is not something to be taken lightly. It is ordained by God and should be entered into in all seriousness. It is a permanent union which is to be severed only by death. Divorce cannot result unless there is sin. If the marriage union is broken by divorce there is always sin on the part of one party or both.

The pastor as the spiritual leader of the people has a responsibility of emphasizing to his people the seriousness of marriage. No where in the Bible is there anything stated permitting trial marriages. Marriage is to be entered into as a permanent union. But if sin has entered in and the marriage union is broken then the pastor is faced with the problem of remarrying those whose marriage has been broken.

As the pastor is faced with the problem of remarrying those who are divorced, there are several things which have to be taken into consideration. 1. To determine what is God's attitude toward this person. 2. To determine what is the attitude of the person asking to be remarried. These factors need to be studied in order to reach a proper decision.

If the person asking to be remarried is clearly the innocent person then the pastor according to the Scripture may remarry him or her. He should deal with them and counsel with them and help them to establish a permanent, happy marriage relationship which can be blessed of God.

If the person asking to be remarried is the guilty party then

the case is more difficult. According to the Scriptures, God is able to forgive the sinner, the one who has committed adultery. The minister will then need to determine whether God has forgiven this person who is asking to be remarried. To determine this he will need to examine the testimony of this one and the testimony of others who know him concerning his life and attitude.

In Matthew 7:20 is recorded this statement of Jesus. "By their fruits ye shall know them." It is difficult to judge and to know what is within the heart of man. But his actions and his attitudes are the fruits which give us a clue to what he is.

If the one asking to be remarried bears testimony that God has forgiven him and if his fruits substantiate this fact, then the pastor can act accordingly. In every case the situation will need to be carefully and prayerfully considered.

As the pastor counsels with the one desiring to be remarried he will need to discover the attitude he has toward marriage. The pastor will need to see whether he is entering into it with the idea of establishing a Christian marriage relationship which is a permanent union or whether he is entering into it haphazardly.

These many factors enter into making a proper decision. The pastor needs to take time to weigh each factor carefully. He is dealing with God's laws and human lives. A hasty decision may lead to great sorrow and heartache in the future.

Summary. In this study it was found that the following principles apply to the remarriage of divorced persons:

1. Where the divorce has been granted on grounds of adultery

the innocent person is free to remarry.

2. A study of Biblical examples points out the truth that God will forgive the one who has committed adultery if he or she repents and meets God's conditions.

3. If the attitude of God toward the one who has broken the marriage relationship is that of forgiveness, then the attitude of man needs to be that of forgiveness too.

4. The Biblical examples lead one to believe that where there is genuine repentance God will forgive and bless a marriage which began contrary to God's law.

5. In order for the pastor to make a proper decision in the re-marrying of divorced persons, he will need to determine the attitude of the person asking to be remarried.

6. In determining the attitude of a divorced person desiring to be remarried the pastor may be guided by these things:

- a. The personal testimony and report of the one asking to be remarried.
- b. The evidence in the life of the individual of the fruits of the Spirit.
- c. The testimony of those who know him.
- d. The help received from God through prayer.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this thesis a study has been made of the problem of the pastor in remarrying divorced persons. The purpose has been to discover if there is any Biblical basis for the remarriage of divorced persons.

I. SUMMARY

A survey of the official position of five denominations regarding the remarriage of divorced persons which was treated in Chapter II showed these things.

The Congregational church follows these principles: (1) The Scriptural doctrine of divorce is stated by the Saviour in Matthew 19:1-9. (2) Ministers may remarry persons who are the innocent parties in divorce proceedings but are urged to withhold sanctions from those whose divorce has been obtained on other than Scriptural grounds. (3) Ministers are to carefully counsel with those divorcees who come to them for marriage to discern whether they are worthy of entering into the marriage relationship.

The Lutheran church follows the principle that Lutheran ministers may remarry the innocent parties where divorce has been obtained on the grounds of adultery or willful desertion.

The official position of the Presbyterian church is to remarry only the innocent party in the case where the divorce has been granted on Scriptural grounds.

Since each Baptist church is self-governing and the Bible is the sole rule of faith and practice, there is no set rule for the whole denomination to follow. Each local minister deals with each individual case as it comes to him. He considers the case in the light of Biblical teaching and makes his decision on the basis of his findings.

Ministers in the Methodist church may remarry the innocent party where the true cause for divorce was adultery or other vicious reasons which through mental or physical cruelty invalidated the marriage vow.

A survey of the practices followed by the ministers of the five denominations as reported in Chapter III showed that five general practices were followed.

1. Some would not remarry any divorced persons under any circumstances. This was followed by:

4% of the Congregational ministers

$\frac{1}{2}$ % of the Lutheran ministers

3% of the Presbyterian ministers

3% of the Baptist ministers

6% of the Methodist ministers

2. Some followed what they regarded as the Biblical standard.

This practice was followed by:

8 $\frac{2}{3}$ % of the Congregational ministers

54% of the Lutheran ministers

30% of the Presbyterian ministers

22% of the Baptist ministers

44% of the Methodist ministers

3. Some remarried the innocent persons who had been divorced on other than Biblical grounds. This was followed by:

28 $\frac{1}{3}$ % of the Congregational ministers

34% of the Lutheran ministers

40% of the Presbyterian ministers

33% of the Baptist ministers

36% of the Methodist ministers

4. Some ministers remarried the guilty persons if they showed evidence that they would establish a satisfactory home. This was followed by:

48 $\frac{2}{3}$ % of the Congregational ministers

10 $\frac{1}{2}$ % of the Lutheran ministers

22% of the Presbyterian ministers

23% of the Baptist Ministers

11% of the Methodist ministers

5. Some ministers remarried any divorced persons who came to them asking to be remarried. This was followed by:

11 $\frac{2}{3}$ % of the Congregational ministers

$\frac{1}{2}$ % of the Lutheran ministers

5% of the Presbyterian ministers

19% of the Baptist ministers

3% of the Methodist ministers

This confusion in practice made evident the need for a uniform standard. The Biblical study of Chapter IV was an effort to find an answer to this need. A number of important principles were noted.

1. Marriage is a divinely ordained union of a man and a woman who leave their father and mother and cleave to each other. No man has the right to break this union. Only death can terminate it.

2. Divorce was given to the people by Moses because of the hardness of their hearts. Moses did not command the men to divorce their wives, but suffered or allowed them to do so.

3. Jesus taught that the only grounds whereupon a man could divorce his wife was adultery. If he put her away for any other reason he caused her to commit adultery. If any man married the woman who was illegally divorced, he committed adultery. If the husband remarried after illegally divorcing his wife, he committed adultery.

4. Paul taught that the Christian mate was not to leave his unbelieving mate. There was always the possibility that the unbelieving mate might be saved. But if the unbelieving mate left, the Christian mate was not under bondage.

5. God is merciful.

6. God forgives the sinner if the sinner meets the conditions for forgiveness.

7. The past sins are forgiven, but sin leaves a scar upon the sinner.

Four Biblical examples were examined which illustrated the application of these principles to the problem of the remarriage of divorced persons. A number of facts which give the pastor guidance in remarrying divorced persons were noted.

1. Where the divorce has been granted on grounds of adultery the innocent person is free to remarry.

2. A study of Biblical examples points out the truth that God

will forgive the one who has committed adultery if he or she repents and meets God's conditions.

3. If the attitude of God toward the one who has broken the marriage relationship is that of forgiveness, then the attitude of man needs to be that of forgiveness too.

4. The Biblical examples lead one to believe that where there is genuine repentance God will forgive and bless a marriage which began contrary to God's law.

5. In order for the pastor to make a proper decision in the remarrying of divorced persons, he will need to determine the attitude of the person asking to be remarried.

6. In determining the attitude of a divorced person desiring to be remarried the pastor may be guided by these things:

- a. The personal testimony and report of the one asking to be remarried.
- b. The evidence in the life of the individual of the fruits of the Spirit.
- c. The testimony of those who know him.
- d. The help received from God through prayer.

II. CONCLUSION

General Conclusions. As a result of this study the following general conclusions were reached.

1. There are differences in practices among ministers concerning the remarrying of divorced persons.
2. Although all five denominations studied, in the Discipline

of official pronouncements, base their official position concerning the remarriage of divorced persons on the Bible, there are differences in the official positions of the five denominations.

3. The Bible does not give much information concerning the remarriage of divorced persons. This could be a reason for the differences in practices of the ministers.

Specific Conclusions. As a result of this study the following specific conclusions were reached.

1. The only Biblical ground for divorce is adultery.

2. Unless the divorce has been obtained on the ground of adultery, the divorced person who remarries is living in adultery and the one who marries the illegally divorced person is also living in adultery. The innocent person is free to remarry.

3. A study of the Biblical examples points out the truth that God will forgive the one who has committed adultery if he or she repents and meets God's conditions.

4. The Bible does not state that those divorced persons whom God has forgiven for breaking the marriage relationship may not be remarried again.

5. Although the Bible gives some information regarding the remarriage of divorced persons, there is not enough definite information given to enable denominations to give dogmatic Scriptural rules for all ministers to follow in remarrying divorced persons.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

From this study has come a recommendation for further study. It is suggested that a study be made of the pastor's responsibility in enabling marriages to succeed. Such a study might include an investigation of the following areas:

1. A pastor program to help young people in choosing their mate.
2. A systematic program of pre-marital counselling.
3. A systematic program of counselling with young married couples to help them to establish a Christian home.

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