

## **"Biblical Grounds..."**

As the pastor you've been asked to perform a wedding ceremony. In the brief ten months since you arrived at this parish you've come to really appreciate Mark Levinson. He's a good guy, he truly seems to care about the Lord and the church and about other people.

It's extremely evident that he cares about Mindy (age 7) and Marci (age 5.) Week after week he has faithfully brought them to church and appears to be doing his very best as a single dad.

You don't know all the details, just enough to be aware of the fact that his wife, Jeannie, decided to bomb out on the family right after Marci was born. She admits it wasn't what a good person would do but, "Then, I'm not really a good person..." is her justification.

Nothing tells you that she's engaged with anyone else, she's just living footloose and fancy free and enjoying the liberty that she's created for herself. She seems to not give much thought to the two little girls. Church members who randomly see her around town say she only responds with, "Oh, I know Mark's a good guy and he'll be a good dad for them and they're all probably better off without me. Got to run!"

So, for about five years Mark has been doing the work of two and doing it all rather admirably. Recently he's had a bit of help. Shortly before you arrived Ivana Carpenter moved into the community. She's a bright, energetic and committed young lady. She never married for she really wanted to establish herself with a solid education and get her career off the ground.

Now that life has settled for her she is ready to settle a bit, too. Being two wonderful and dedicated adults Mark and Ivana began to gravitate toward each other. It's evident that she dearly loves the girls and that they just adore her.

To no one's surprise there is a wedding in the offing and you've been asked to officiate.

The one complication is that you do have some in the church and in the community who have clearly established themselves as the morals police. They are quietly demanding a clear proof that Mark actually has "Biblical grounds" to move forward. Becoming the "bedroom police" was not part of your seminary training and it really is not an attractive calling to you but some of the saints just won't let it drop.

Eventually Mark, good guy that he is, affirms that you should clarify with Jeannie that she actually has been unfaithful and has, therefore, easily provided Mark the "grounds" for remarrying.

Bad news, Pastor. When you do approach Jeannie (after a lot of fear and trepidation) she lets you know in no uncertain terms that it's none of your "*blankety-blank*" business and she won't play the "hypocritical church game" with anyone. She has no interest in affirming or denying whether or not she has been intimately involved with anyone other than Mark. Her response leaves you high and dry for ammo against the "morals police."

What now? Do you respond to the "morals police?" Do you perform the ceremony?

**CLOSEOUT THOUGHTS:** Any pastor of any experience has faced situations parallel to this. Life is just too convoluted for any of us to escape the moments when we will be confronted by messy challenges from messy people.

I know I have evolved in my thinking on this over the decades. I know that I am now ready for "unfaithfulness" to have a much broader definition than the narrow expression of some.

Sure, with some it's only the "weakness of compromise" on my part but I just haven't been able to shake the fact that the Bible says that one who doesn't support their family is worse than an infidel. In Corinthians 7 Paul also says shares that some of the rules may not remain the norm when you are dealing with "the unbelieving spouse."

Is it a huge leap of logic to equate an abandoning spouse with the "infidel?"

I absolutely do not want to water down the serious expectations of vow and covenant and oath. I also know that real life is not as clean as many would wish it to be and I have conviction that there are many ways for a spouse to reveal that they are "unfaithful."