

Principles of Marriage

Factors - literal, and typological:

Inception-- Gen. 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.A-Wife, type of the church, as bride of Christ.

B- Husband, type of Christ (He never leaves or forsakes the church, neither should the husband, his wife)

2. Physical and spiritual unity.

3. Permanent relationship for the dimension of earthly life, as in permanency of church/Christ relationship for time and eternity.

4. Church/Christ union unbreakable--so should wife/husband union remain unbroken (except by death).

Matt. 19:6b....."what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

5. No separation, or divorce allowed under the unquestionable meaning of the Matt. 19:6b admonition.

The intended permanency of marriage as instituted by God admits of no allowance for divorce--from its inception through all of time.

Jesus never permitted divorce in answer to questions from the Pharisees, etc. in New Testament passages on the subject of marriage. He referred to the Old Testament Mosaic regulatory law (given particularly because of the Israelites "hardness of hearts"), not as an endorsement; but immediately stated the original principle: "but in the beginning it was not so", having just previously quoted the injunction: "what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." This clearly establishes the commanded permanency of the marriage relationship. Matt. 19:6-8.

Then, in the very next verse, Matt. 19:9, the Lord reinforces the commandment with the specification that the only allowable cause for putting away a wife was "fornication". It remains only to define "fornication", and "wife", and to correspondingly determine the dispensational applicability of the passage of scripture involved.

First, then, what is meant by "fornication"? We note in Matt. 5:32 that both "fornication" and "adultery" are used --indicating at least some implicit and technical difference. If it can be determined in passages referring to the question at hand, that fornication is the biblical term for illicit sexual union for unmarried people, and adultery the term for sexual infidelity in marriage cases only, then we would have such passages as Matt: 5:32, etc. explained to us.

It is important to note here, that the word fornication may be used to cover the whole range of sexual immorality, including adultery, incest, etc. So, therefore, the various uses

of the word fornication must be determined contextually.

If we examine the Jewish legal customs and procedures relating to engagement and marriage, we will indeed gain the necessary light on the subject in question.

Referring to Joseph and Mary (Matt. 1:18-25), we have the example of (1) the engagement, or betrothal relationship, and (2) the associated use of the word "wife".

(1) "Before they came together" (co-habited in the marriage union), "she was found with child of the Holy Ghost . Then Joseph" (not knowing this divine cause) "was minded to put her away" (give her a bill of divorcement) "privately" (because of assumed pre-marital unfaithfulness; to wit: fornication)".

(2) "the angel of the Lord appeared saying fear not to take unto thee Mary thy 'wife'" (in this case, a betrothal usage of the term)

That Matt. 19:9 is to be specifically interpreted in the above context, is further scored by the fact that both of the other two Gospels' reference to the Lord's teaching herewith, omit the fornication exception. (Mk. 10:2-12, Luke 16:18)*

The conspicuously slight (even parenthetical) secondary reference which Jesus made to the subject of divorce: in only three words in all the gospel accounts, is too significant to overlook. That is, significant as ^{to} what it does not mean, beyond its limited specific application; herein explained. To wit: a permissive Jewish betrothal regulation, to dissolve an otherwise legally binding marriage contract.

Such dissolution, or more properly ^{an} annulment, was also executed for prohibited marriages of too-near relatives. It should also be noted, that pre-marital unfaithfulness (sexual indulgence) could precede the technical engagement period, as well.

* If the so-called exception clause were to be an allowance for divorce after actual marriage, it would not have been left out of the Mark and Luke accounts--nor proscribed in the Romans 7, and I Cor. 7 passages.

Moreover, the language in each such case expressly inveighs against dissolution of marriage for any cause except death.

I mentioned that it was also important to determine the dispensational distinction of Matt. 19:9. It is unthinkable that the Lord would leave out the exception clause of that verse, if it applied to marriage unions in the present dispensation.

It should be remarked that scripture principles and regulations are not primarily given for either the heathen of the law dispensation, nor the unsaved of the present age. But to the extent that marriage was instituted for all men in

the time of innocency, to be honored and maintained for all of time, the basic requirements and provisions of the marriage law would hence apply to all mankind.

It is essential to note carefully the progressive, contextual New Testament treatment of the marriage subject. The Matt. 5 and 19 passages distinctly deal with the Jews, in the necessary transitional period from law to grace.

In Matthew we have the only New Testament instance where the Lord makes any comment seeming to qualify the permanency principle of marriage. But upon examination of this so-called "exception clause", we should be pleased to find that there really is no variation, or modification, of the basic principle.

When we see that there is a betrothal aspect of the subject, by reference to the pointed example of Matt. 1:18-25, we may safely interpret the Matt. 19:9 clause: "except for fornication", to apply to similar engagement, or pre-marital cases.

A further example of fornication being the term intended to refer to pre-marital sexual immorality, is found in I Cor. 7:1-2: "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote to me: it is good for a man not to touch a woman"(that is, to remain unmarried and chaste). "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband".

The "Lets", and the "Let nots" of marriage.

I Cor. 7 (to be connected with the related principles of the preceding chapter, from verse 9):

Vs. 2 "Let every man have his own wife"(become married, that is)and,

"Let every woman have her own husband"(per first clause parenthetical note).

Vs. 3 "Let the husband and wife render due benevolence to each other"(slightly paraphrased).

Vs. 9 "Let them marry"(if they have not the power of continency, or gift of celibacy from the Lord). Same sense as vss. 2, and 3.

Vs.10 "Let not the wife depart from her husband"(for any cause).

Vs.11 ".....but if she depart"(always unjustified)"let her remain unmarried" (not to add one sin to another), "or be reconciled to her husband, and let not the husband put away" (leave, or divorce) "his wife".

Vs.12 "..... let him not put her away".

Vs.13 "..... let her not leave him".

Vs.15 "..... let him depart" (this must be interpreted within the controls of verses 11, and 39; noting the difference between bondage, as slavery, and bound, as by contract. Also note the peace admonition.)

Vs. 17 ".....as the Lord has called every one, so let him walk".

Vs 20,24 "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called" (Married when saved: stay married. Loosed from a marriage when saved: stay loosed. Per vs. 27).

To extend the meaning of Matt. 19:9 beyond the specific interpretation cited, has no New Testament teaching, or example to support it.

Technically, the law is God's dispensational method of dealing with man until the event of the cross (Gal. 3:19), whereupon grace is the new principle in effect, thereafter.

We should further recognize the fact that Jesus's gospel ministry was primarily to the Jews, still under the law. And even that, more particularly in Matthew, than the other gospels.

Yet, we err if we miss the great significance of the inherent grace principles of His teaching in the Gospels. It may at least be said, that while he came "to fulfill the law"; it was to do so that grace could begin.

He would not teach his disciples to perpetuate the law (the Mosaic social, and religious system) any farther. Neither may we bring any of it, per se, beyond the cross; lest we mingle law and grace!

By all of which, I mean to say, relating to our subject, that there is no allowance made for divorce in the marriage law of God. This "law" preceded, and now supersedes the law of Moses.

While this paper is not an exhaustive treatment of the subject, the following summary contents set forth my belief of the biblical New Testament teaching of the principles of marriage.

The Marriage Law - instituted by God in the time of innocency--irrevocable through all dispensations--not abrogated by the Mosaic law (permissive regulations, instituted as judgments and ordinances upon the circumstances of Israel's "hardness of hearts"). This was a dispensational dealing--not approved or sanctioned by God, per se--but given or allowed for reasons unique to God's sovereign purposes at that time. In a word, I am convinced that the Mosaic permissive law of divorcement, is not valid under the dispensation of grace.

The "One Flesh" principle - This is specifically established by the act of sexual union. Such union constitutes marriage of itself, and no particular civil ceremony, or other action is essential to consummate actual marriage in God's sight. Ref. Gen. 2:24, I Cor. 6:16.

The implications of this basic fact alone, when deliberated upon, should teach us considerable about the serious consequences of the whole institution.

The Permanency Principle - God intended that marriage be inseparable --except by death. "Let not man put asunder", covers it all. Would God give such an unqualified command, and then modify it somewhere else in his word to us on the subject? If he were, within his own sovereign right, to make a change or exception, would he not make it abundantly clear? Yes, indeed, because whatever God reveals for us to know, ^{he} never makes obscure--only subject to the science of diligent study and devotion (to Him, therein). Man creates conflicts and confusion; to wit: various doctrinal controversies which, to the church's shame, are often not resolved.

The following quote from Charles C. Ryrie, helps to conclude some of my position on the subject:

"A final question is this: Are there never any justifiable grounds for divorce? If by "justifiable" is meant scriptural, the answer seems to be no. Everything in the New Testament points to the disallowance of divorce. Marriage is placed on the most ideal plane, and the union is to be kept inviolate. However, believers do not always live according to God's ideal standards, and divorces do occur. Indeed in some instances, it may seem as if a divorce is not only inevitable but desirable. Everything should be done to prevent the dissolution of a marriage. If it happens, then remarriage seems to be out of the question. Yet if divorce and/or remarriage do occur, this does not mean that God is through with those individuals. But it does mean certain restrictions in service, for the example of a divorced or remarried person is not that which should be held up to young people in the church. The church should receive such people and minister to their special needs and seek to help them find a proper place of usefulness." Underscoring, and margin note, mine.

(subject to repentance principle)

Two key facts (of many) should be indisputable to Christians on this subject, as well as any other:

God's principles, are ideals--which through His grace, are attainable standards.

In other words, we have no right to ^{be} anything less than idealists, and God's grace is sufficient for every situation in life. No matter how overwhelming and "impossible" some situations may well appear to be--either to understand, or overcome--God's promises of victory are more than equal to the most formidable problems in life.

"There hath no trial taken you, but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tried above that ye are able; but will with the trial also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." I Cor. 10:13.

Some Practical Applications of
The Principles of Marriage

First, it seems advisable to enlarge somewhat on the pre-marital interpretation of "fornication", and "wife", in Matt. 5:32, and 19:9.

In which connection, I would also re-emphasize the one-flesh principle, that sexual union between man and woman constitutes the essential marriage act ordained by God.

Assume, then, the case of a man who by a recognized civil marriage ceremony, has become thereby legally "married" to a woman. Before the time of their first sexual union it becomes known (for a certainty) that the woman ("wife") was guilty of a previous sexual relationship with someone other than her present "husband" (whether before or after their civil marriage date).

Would the pre-marital interpretation which I have indicated, apply to this situation, as well as to the more definite betrothal (engagement) cases? If, as I believe, the dividing line between unmarried and married is actually at the point of first sexual union, then the "fornication" and "wife" interpretation of the Lord's words in Matt. 5:32, and 19:9 would teach that a divorce (or dissolution of "marriage") is not only permitted here, but required.

Allowing that God would give a way for the man not to violate the sexual union principle, would he not have to divorce her (in the pre-marital context) to avoid adultery with another man's "wife", or fornication with a harlot (one of which, being her true biblical status)?

How extremely important it is, then, to be fully convicted of the basic marriage law factors--so that we can know how to decide even the more difficult cases and situations that can occur.

Since, as I believe, no New Testament scriptures teach or allow divorce for actual adultery (marital), what recourse does the innocent party have? Here again, is what I referred to in similar words, as the idealism of grace. Would God tell us to "make not provision for the flesh" (Rom. 13:14), and then make allowance for our failure to uphold the marriage commands?

There is no denying the violence done to the intimacy of a marriage, when one commits adultery against the other. But must not the Christian be responsible and able, under God's unlimited grace--to forgive even the most crushing sin that one might commit against another? The "all things" of Phil. 4:13, the "able to bear it" of I Cor. 10:13, the "my grace is sufficient for thee" of II Cor. 12:9, and so many more unlimited promises of God, can not fail to make the Christ-

ian triumph, even in the most overwhelming situations. And may we never underestimate how much God can and might do by direct, intervening action. Again, by another promise, "with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:27).

Not even solutions to the following other possible marriage problems:

Wifebeating	Desertion
Child Abuse	Lawlessness
Drunkenness	Etc., Etc.
Non-support	

The "such were some of you" of I Cor. 6:9-11, is no prettier list--and what, at least potentially, were, or are, not all of us? All the things he forgave us of, he wants us to learn to forgive each other of, and to go on loving each other--no matter what; like he does us!

Consider another life situation, and what principles apply:

A "single" man becomes saved, who before that time had a sexual relationship with a woman. What is his status before God? Is everything under the blood, with no carryover of that sin?

Does the marriage law of God (Gen. 2:24, and I Cor. 6:16) still have effect there? There are many variations of situations possible in this example, but let's assume one, as follows:

The woman is similarly "unmarried" (in the world's way), and for simplicity's sake had no sexual relationship with anyone else.

Does not the one-flesh principle make them married? And should not the Christian man seek to fully legalize that relationship? If he does not, he further contributes to her probable adultery, and may not himself marry another, without being an adulterer.

If the woman had, after their affair, become married to another, the man can do nothing about it. His sin is forgiven him through Christ's death, but he is to abide as he is (without right of further marriage). Per I Cor. 7:20, 24, and 27.

One may not hide behind the cross, in a situation where restitution, and correction of any such matter is still possible.

There are many other cases by which the principles of marriage must be tested, and because of the great sinfulness of man, some are exceedingly involved and difficult. Yet they can and must be conformed to "what saith the Lord".

That is, we must become convinced of God's ordained, revealed principles of marriage, and establish and uphold them in our churches. Sad to say, there is a diminishing testimony of a strict position against divorce, and remarriage, today.

May God help us to see the truth, which so many are missing!

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Question of Church Policy
Regarding Divorce and Re-marriage

What should our church (any church) policy be concerning the subjects of divorce, and re-marriage?

Many, indeed most, churches adopt policies which fall somewhere between a strict, and moderate or more liberal position on the matters.

Therefore, various rules and regulations are established as to whether divorce, or re-marriage is justifiable in some cases, and what degrees of service may be permitted persons who have been involved in either matter.

Speaking from the standpoint of belief in the strict view, that divorce is disallowed on all grounds for the New Testament believer--and that re-marriage is only permitted upon death of the marriage partner, I would make the following statement of governing principles.

Is it sin, or not?

First, not only do I believe that divorce, and re-marriage (except for reason of death) are not to be permitted--they are indeed sin of the I Cor. 5 class--which, unless truly repented of, are subject to extreme church disciplinary action (as in Matt. 18:17, and I Cor. 5:5, 9,11, 13).

Old Testament case though it may be, let us learn from the tremendous example of David's great sin and subsequent actions in II Sam. 11-12, and Psalm 51. All the elements of real importance are in that example, to be applied in principle to our church sphere.

His great sin was fully exposed to Israel. He was not spared from punishment because he was a king. He would have been put to death, as was the law's requirement, had he not truly repented (II Sam. 12:13); which he did, and was fully restored to fellowship and service.

Yet his deliverance was not without dire consequences, befitting the gravity of his case (vs. 14). His child, born of the adulterous union with Bathsheba, was sentenced by God to die, the sword would not depart from his house, fornication was decreed against his wives by his own son, who himself was caused to be killed by another son, etc.

Can we use the ark of the covenant errors in I Sam. 4-6 vs. the right way of chap. 7 which led to revival, to illustrate the importance of coming to the right decision on the divorce and remarriage question?

For example, can any policy be established that does not pre-

cisely follow the principles God has given to deal with the subject matters. Wouldn't anything less be a compromise, or substitute; like bearing the ark in a forbidden way (i.e., some Philistine, humanistic idea that God would "allow" because of the extenuating (?) circumstances)?

Is the traditional ambivalence over the problems, really a good reason to think that God has not given us definite unequivocal principles to obey?

What are those principles?

1. That marriage is not ^{to} be dissolved except by death; hence, all divorce is unlawful.
2. Re-marriage, except after death of marriage partner, is also unlawful.
3. Divorce, or unlawful re-marriage are sins against God--requiring (1) genuine repentance, or (2) disciplinary action by the church, and/or (3) judgment by God.

The procedure for dealing with the problems must be as outlined in Matt. 18:15-18, and I Cor. 5 .

The model for repentance ought to be that of David (II Sam. 12, and Psalm 51).

The "one wife" restriction for elders, and deacons needs to be carefully considered before more limitation is put upon such Christians than God may require--especially in light of the repentance principle. I believe the subject qualification in I Tim. 3, and Titus 1 requires monogamy, and that any prior marriages are either taken care of by the cross, or if after salvation, by genuine repentance.

Some might argue that there were greater restrictions placed upon prospective priests under the old covenant--than the above interpretation would put upon New Testament leaders and servants. But when we think about the dispensational difference in effective principles, we can fully support the contentions.

The Old Testament priest (especially high priest) was subject to many special requirements--not even mentioned for a New Testament elder, etc. His marriage, as well as other specifications, had to (at least in type) conform to the moral perfections of Christ.

But the basis was law; not grace, as with us. Christ fulfills all such requirements of righteousness, and more, for us--which the law must exact from one outside of the grace principle--though he could not truly meet any such demands, spiritually.

If we are to let grace have its perfect work, we can not modify any of its requirements of us; lest we deny its capacity by our unfaithful, deviant actions.

Let us remember to call sin, sin; and deal with it only as such!

Comments Concerning the
Implementation of Scriptural
Marriage Principles

Since our church situation already involves various cases of divorce, and re-marriage, the introduction of a strict no-divorce, no unlawful re-marriage policy requires very careful steps of application.

First, there must be an admission on the part of church leadership that they have failed to both learn and teach the true interpretation of Biblical marriage principles.

If there is not agreement that fault ought to be shared, what consolation, or hope of solution can either party expect?

The impact of such a pronouncement upon people involved in the unlawful situations--even when handled privately first (which should be considered essential) must be thoughtfully anticipated.

What could be much more difficult than to have to explain to a divorced, re-married couple (with children from their previous marriages) that they are living in sin (adultery), and that unless there is true repentance, they are subject to severe church discipline?

Is there any scriptural alternative? What happens, eventually, to both the church and the subject individuals if God's principles are not fully obeyed?

Do we help or hurt an erring brother, by modifying or failing to carry out God's specific requirements? Will we offer the plea of an incorrigible humanism when we stand before the Lord to be judged for our actions?

Isn't it strange, how man will substitute his own rationalized concept of principles to make something "easier", but which can never work, for a simple, clearly stated commandment, which, while "harder" to have to do initially, is the only thing that ultimately can work?

And we have made a "hard" thing much harder, by failing to do the job right before. Obviously, then, a difficult process of reformation must take place in the church to overcome the various uncorrected situations that exist.

In our mortal weakness, we are not equal to the task, but God is, and we are His. We may hope for another way, but God says it His way, or nothing. He promises all the grace that is needed to do it His way, but no alternatives.

Therefore, I can not, in clear conscience, propose or agree with any church policy governing the subjects of marriage, divorce, and re-marriage--but one which conforms to the interpretations of scriptural principles which I have outlined and explained in the paper preceding this supplemental section.

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