

The Voice IN THE Wilderness

SERMON of the Month

THE DISINTEGRATION OF FAMILY AND CHURCH

ANEMIC FAMILIES IN THE CHURCH ARE A TRAGEDY

The Voice in the Wilderness has been no stranger to addressing sensitive and controversial subjects. In recent issues of this publication, difficult topics have been discussed and readership has been vocal. The majority has been very supportive. Repeatedly, cards, letters, even phone calls have expressed appreciation for the biblical stand this ministry takes, as well as, the boldness to place in print those scriptural positions.

Easily, two or three articles have generated the most comments and criticism. One such was printed in March 2002 entitled, "Divorce and Remarriage." Obviously, for many this is not "cut and dry." As you know, the definition of marriage has been in stiff debate by state lawmakers and even amongst some denominational hierarchy. Only a few years ago most Americans would not have hesitated to say never. Never in this country will the institute of marriage and the family come under such an attack as to obliterate the biblical, traditional understanding of that which was divinely ordained. Never will judges and legislators by agenda aggressively sit in action against the very principles at the heart of America's foundation and success. Never will churches and clergy dare sanction homosexuality, ordain homosexuals, let alone, condone homosexual marriages.

I have lived long enough to see a day when such perversion and

ungodliness was unheard of. A day when red-blooded Americans would NEVER allow legislators, judges, much less churches permit or promote such wicked, destructive behavior. But now I have lived long enough to see that NEVER become NOW when the very foundation and fabric of America is being destroyed in a cesspool of hell spawned perversion.

Dear Pastor, I serve you notice. Continue to sermonette with those therapeutic addresses and you will be personally accountable for the ruination of many souls. Whether you agree with the following or not, divorce and the spiritually anemic families in our church is a tragedy. How many men do you have in your congregation that are scripturally qualified for office of deacon? Does your singles ministry encourage single, never married young men and women to develop relationships with divorced individuals? Does your preaching and ministry reach out in love with scripturally sound counsel and support to the divorced? Does your congregation understand clearly what the Bible says about divorce and remarriage? Concerning marriages you perform, does your position vary case by case or do you have clearly delineated teaching for your congregation? There is not only a world of lost souls out there, but congregations full of folk held captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil. Do not be afraid to preach specifics, holy living, and the

consequences of sin. Remember, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" John 8:32. Preach the truth in love. Our congregations need to hear the truth clearly and specifically preached.

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

"Win friends and influence people?" This article probably will win few friends, but I pray some will be influenced to search the scriptures. When was the last time you heard definitive preaching on divorce and remarriage? So many preachers have vacillated on this subject, much like the subjects of music and dress due to the pressures of our day. We preachers often exhort our young people not to give in to peer pressure. The compromise of this age has caused many a preacher to change his stand.

One report stated that the divorce rate within the church has now reached that of the world. If that were so, must pastors, Christians, and churches modify, adapt, or change previously held positions to accommodate? With the rise in the divorce rate of church members, do we now re-look at the grounds for divorce? Those who have been divorced and remarried, in almost epidemic numbers, must they be considered today qualified for any and every office in the church?

Before we venture any further, let

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me state clearly, God loves you! His mercy and grace are extended. Whether you are divorced and single, or divorced and remarried, His will for you is to be saved and know the joy of a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Make no mistake, this article is not intended to single out or condemn anyone. The purpose is to set forth the Truth of God's Word and not the trends of this world. By the way, we mortals muddy the waters. The Bible is quite clear on the subject.

IN THE BEGINNING – LEAVE AND CLEAVE

Where shall we start? How about the beginning? Read Genesis 2:21-24 and note verse 24. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Emphasis must be placed on the "leaving," "cleaving," and "one flesh." Apart from the Word of God, marriage cannot be understood in all its richness and beauty. The "all" of marriage grows out of God's covenant relationship with His people. Depart from The Book and His Will and all is open to the devourer. In Genesis, is the origin of marriage when the Almighty made a helpmeet for Adam? This institution preceded civil law, government, and even the church. God, himself, ordained that a man "leave" his father and mother and shall "cleave" unto his wife. The covenant union of one man to one woman for life become "one flesh." One, do you understand this? There is no other type, picture, or relationship that says it like marriage. It is more than companionship, more than completion, more than commitment in a physical act and beyond. Here it is—you must get this. "For this cause

shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" Ephesians 5:31 & 32. Marriage for the believer is not some "fuzzy wuzzy, touchy, feely, ooh I love you, gotta have you, can't do without you arrangement contract until I "feel" different event. Study the "love" Paul is talking about in Ephesians 5:25-28. What is this hidden mystical meaning? If it's a mystery, how are we responsible? Don't misunderstand, for it is "as plain as the nose on your face." It is all spelled out in Ephesians 5: 22-33, "I speak concerning Christ and the church." As believers, we are to let the light and love of our marital union show to a lost world that has not a clue (being "dead in trespasses and sins" – Eph 2:1) as to who Christ is, or what the joy of salvation is all about. The world cannot imagine heaven and the wonder of it all. This "mystery" once hidden is now fully revealed. In living color, a full-length portrayal of "Christ and the Church" is on display for all to see – this is the "cleaving of one man unto one wife; one flesh."

LET NOT MAN PUT ASUNDER!

ATTENTION (sirens, bells, whistles, alarms!) NOW HEAR THIS, NOW HEAR THIS! Of this divinely, ordained union, the very God and author of said union states: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" Matthew 19:6. Tell me now; what man would dare shake a writing of divorcement in the face of God? I'll tell you what man. The man determined to break scripture, follow self-desire and live in sin, that's the man (or woman). No, now, Ronnie,

you are uncaring. You just don't understand my situation.

Hold the line. What does God say: "Let not man put asunder" Matt. 19:6. "For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away:" Malachi 2:16. So if that be the case, where does divorce come into the picture? Hear the Lord in the matter: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." Matt. 19:9. Only if the husband or wife engages in the habitual practice of fornication and will not repent and return to the Lord does the scripture permit divorce. Keep in mind I said repent and return to the Lord. Only can a marriage be what it should when the husband and wife are what they should be with the Lord. And if there be an innocent partner, that individual should desire reconciliation to the Lord for their sinning mate. Is there any hope for this one who erred from the truth? There is power in prayer, and the Holy Spirit does convict.

James 5:19 & 20 says: "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

Yes, it is clear that the Lord permits a divorce when fornication has been committed. However, the Lord does not require or command divorce. Two questions I ask: 1) Is the Lord interested in the repentance of the one who has sinned as well as the reconciliation of a marriage that has been jeopardized by sin, self, and Satan? 2) Should the spiritual partner (the one innocent of wrong) not with

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prayer and tears seek reconciliation for their mate, not only to the marriage but also to the Lord? On both accounts the answer is yes. Now the innocent party must face some soul-searching questions. Who in all the hurt and wrong will be the spiritual one here? When we talk about “the innocent party” is that individual willing to forgive? Will he or she pray and seek the Holy Spirit intervention and conviction? Is there a submissive heart yielded to what God can do even in the darkest hour?

I am about to say some things that can easily be misunderstood. This is not meant to be pious or callous. In all my years of preaching, pastoring and counseling, I’ve seen such bitterness and anger. I’m talking about on the part of the individual who is suppose to be the innocent one in all this mess. The one who committed fornication confesses and wants reconciliation, but no, “the innocent partner” will not hear of it. Again, not to seem unreasonable or callous, I’m not sure I’ve truly known more than one or two “innocent individuals” involved in a divorce. Then I ask, “Can I be certain in those two cases?”

Well, Bro. Ronnie, just how long am I to pray for reconciliation – a month, a year, ten years? Don’t I deserve to get on with my life? After all, I’m not the one who started this whole mess! Remember, even though Jesus permits divorce on grounds of fornication, He never required it. Jesus never commanded nor does the bible in any way intimate that a marriage must end in divorce due to sin or any other cause for that matter.

Listen to these words: “...love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall

be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven” Luke 6:35-37. “Then came Peter to Him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven” Matt: 18:21 & 22. “Say not thou; I will recompense evil; but wait on the Lord, and He shall save thee” Prov. 20:22.

If one partner proceeds with divorce, it may be the other partner cannot stop the action. Also, as tragic as it always is, the child of God is permitted to seek divorce if their mate is engaged in fornication. Fornication is the only ground given in the bible for divorce. For the innocent partner, forgiveness and reconciliation should be prayerfully and diligently pursued. Then for any other reason than fornication, the innocent party should not seek divorce.

“Wait on the Lord, and He shall save thee.” I must interject something I believe is important at this point. In the case of a violent and even life-threatening situation, I have recommended separation. I have witnessed several times the very life of a mother and her children in jeopardy by a husband completely out of control. I never suggested divorce but a period of separation and even legal restraint to prevent an even more horrible situation. Keep in mind; these marriages were never scripturally what they should be. It is not my purpose here to deal with these type problems. You reap what you sow; and in many cases, I have found myself in the middle of

somebody’s harvest with the crop coming in, and no preacher was gonna’ do a thing about it.

By the way, for all you people who want your rights. It should be noted the equality Jesus clearly teaches concerning this subject – Sin is Sin. There are no exceptions for male/female, husband or wife. Jesus does not nor never did condone sin. He always confronted sin. Men and women then have the choice to deal with it. Repentance and forgiveness was the message. Without question, men and women alike are accountable. Women were not property to be discarded at will. Men too had biblical teaching to clearly guide. Both husband and wife can find that path of success and happiness in Ephesians 5:21-33. “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” Hebrews 13:4. Take care of doing right yourself. God will take care of the rest. On your time schedule – No, in His time. We are to “Be still and know Him” Ps. 46:10. If we “wait upon the Lord” we have His promise. (Ps 27:14, Isa. 40:31, Rom. 8:25-31) If you rush ahead of the Lord in anger, hurt and revenge, you only heap to yourself guilt in the matter. I have seen this – one partner is unfaithful and the other then decides, “Two can play this game” and pursues an extramarital relationship as means of vengeance; or immediately files for divorce and does everything possible to make life miserable through legal avenues for the husband/wife that has sinned. Who exactly is the innocent party here? (Rarely is there one). “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was

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not so" Matt 19:8. Matthew Henry states, "...none can wish to have the liberty of divorce, without virtually owning the hardness of their hearts."

So what about remarriage? Fornication is the scriptural ground for divorce according to Christ in Matt. 19:9. In event of death, the surviving partner is free to marry. For example, Paul says in I Cor. 7:39, "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." Death permits the believer to again marry but only to another believer. Paul also says it is a "happier" state to not marry again.

The Law of Moses allowed divorce for hardness of heart, but the law of Christ forbids it expecting love and reconciliation. Christ permits (not commands) divorce on grounds of fornication, while Moses called for punishment by death. Please don't miss the heart of what Christ is teaching. If the husband loves his wife and the wife reverences her husband, living together in this bond of grace, there is no need of divorce. The Pharisees tempting Jesus said, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause." Jesus was confronted with men who had a heart problem. Marriage problems are heart problems. Divorce is a heart problem. "The Law of Moses considered the hardness of men's hearts, but the gospel of Christ cures it; and His grace takes away the heart of stone, and gives a heart of flesh. By the law was the knowledge of sin, but by the gospel was the conquest of it," Matthew Henry.

Yes, I understand Christ permitted divorce on grounds of fornication. No, I do not believe Christ is teaching remarriage in cases

of divorce due to fornication. Divorce for causes other than fornication and marrying another is clearly committing adultery. In response the disciples said, "...If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" Matt. 19:10. "If I'm locked into this thing of marriage like you are describing Jesus, I would be better off not to marry in the first place." Some are eunuchs at birth, some made eunuchs by men and some choose to be for the Kingdom. But not all are able to receive this, indeed few can. Therefore, those who choose to marry also choose the commitment and responsibility. Buck up. Be a man, be a woman and accept the God given privilege as well as duty of fidelity in marriage. Quit your whining about rights, equality and fairness. Get to work and enjoy the blessed fruits of faithfulness to God and see what He can do in your marriage. Someone said marriage is made in heaven, but the husband and wife are responsible for the earthly maintenance.

I hear you – you disagree. So do many of my preacher friends. So do many scholars and commentaries. Can we possibly agree on the following?

1. Jesus permits divorce in case of fornication - **Agreed?**
2. If someone gets a divorce and marries another, except for fornication, that person commits adultery - **Agreed?**
3. In marriage does the man and woman (twain) become one flesh? - **Agreed?**
4. Is it true, "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." - **Agreed?**
5. In most wedding ceremonies (Christian weddings) the vows go something like this: For better, for worse...For richer, for

poorer...In sickness and in health...To love, and to cherish 'til death do us part. - **Agreed?**

6. God designed marriage to be a picture of the relationship between Christ and His church - Ephesians 5:32 - **Agreed?**

REMARRIAGE

Now we may agree to disagree - Agreed?

The only ground for divorce is fornication. The only ground for remarriage is the death of the mate. Jesus did not give permission for remarriage in case of fornication. It is true He states that divorce is permitted only in the case of fornication. And it is true that Jesus said to divorce one's husband or wife except for cause of fornication and remarry was to commit adultery. However, Jesus did not give a wholesale endorsement of remarriage for those whose mate is a fornicator.

Too long have the church and pastors played a situation game with the scriptures. "He/she did this, then she/he did that and therefore the bible says thus and so." No, no, a thousand times no. "Thus saith the Lord," and that settles it. We must not analyze the scriptures in light of our sordid circumstances.

1) They divorce on unbiblical grounds; but now that he remarried, she is free to remarry because he committed adultery. No!

2) She committed fornication so he has a biblical right to divorce, remarry and get on with life. No! Where is prayer, fasting and waiting on the Lord? What happened to forgiveness and reconciliation? If the church, let alone individual believers would get right with God and His Word, the power needed to rebuke

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sin would be available. If the guilty refuses to repent and be delivered, then should not the church "deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus?" I Cor. 5:5. However, there is so much of the world in the church today that the church has no power to "deliver such an one," period!

"But the Lord can't solve these problems. My husband/wife has deeply hurt me. They deserve to be punished. I did no wrong, I deserve to be happy." On and on the confusion goes, and the further we get from true biblical Christianity. "...Men ought always to pray, and not to faint;" Luke 18:1. If storm winds blow upon our marriage, the night has never been so dark, the valley so deep, we can, and we must Trust GOD! Pray and don't faint. Divorce, at least divorce and remarriage may be the ultimate fainting spell. It need not be. No, I cannot condone divorce and remarriage, regardless the grounds. As a preacher, I will not perform the ceremony for an individual divorced wanting to remarry. I simply cannot get peace about such. There are many more scriptures I would like to discuss, but must encourage the reader to "study to shew thyself approved..."

Since this scripture was brought

to my attention, I will conclude with these comments. It has already been stated that, "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." I Cor. 7:39. But what about I Cor. 7:15 where it says, "...if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace?" So if in verse 39 the wife is not bound after death; is that not true in verse 15 when it says, "...not under bondage..."? Please note that verse 15 is talking about a believer married to an unbeliever. This could be due to one individual getting saved and the mate remaining unsaved. The unbeliever then decides to leave his or her saved mate. Then the saved spouse "is not under bondage." The Greek word for bondage in verse 15 means to enslave – bring into bondage and is different from the word used in verse 39 for bound. Bound means to bind or be in bonds. In other words if the unbeliever leaves, the believer is not brought into bondage to force a marriage relationship to further peril. The hope is verse 16. Of course death releases the surviving spouse and they are no longer bound. Verse 39.

Dear reader, what a joy to be a child of the King, joint heirs with Jesus Christ. What a privilege in our

marriages and families to be a living, daily demonstration of Christ and the Church. "What He hath joined together let not man put asunder." But Bro. Ronnie, I'm divorced – I'm divorced and remarried. Let me say here that whatever the past, whatever the sin, get it under the blood. "He is faithful and just..." I John 1:9. There is victory in Jesus. Then commit your all to Him and live according to His Word.

Now just a note to pastors, ordaining counsel, etc. If you take this position, you will not have to worry about showing favoritism to a deacon's daughter who is divorced and wants you to perform the ceremony for her remarriage. If for some reason you don't think the remarriage is right, then you will loose a deacon and family. Preach this position, and they do not even ask you. Or how about ordaining preachers and deacons who have been divorced and remarried. I have seen groups continually rehash case after case and inevitably create division and bad feelings. Why? Because we are trying to judge each individual situation and not simply take a stand on the Word. If you allow yourself to be trapped in a personality or respecter of persons' game, everyone is a loser. Preach it; spell it out, and with love take a stand. It is certain to relieve a lot of headache! -RLW



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| 1) Matthew 19:9 "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." | 2) Mark 10:11 & 12 "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery." | 3) Luke 16:18 "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery." |
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(Please note that Mark and Luke did not mention remarriage in the light of fornication. Jesus is teaching that the only biblical grounds for divorce is fornication. As is obvious in the parallel references of Mark and Luke, Jesus is not teaching about remarriage but what the grounds for divorce are.)

