

# Observations and Experiences

## Regarding Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage (3)

Through the years I have kept notes and records regarding marriages and divorces of people where I have preached and served as an elder of the church. Some of these marriages I participated in, conducting the “marriage ceremony,” filling out the marriage license, and returning it by mail or in person to the courthouse where the license was issued to the couple. I have attended many weddings simply as a guest, not participating in any way in the proceedings. I have attended several divorce proceedings which were conducted in “open court,” where people could go to the courtroom and listen to the proceedings which were open to the public. I have never been a witness in a divorce case nor in a divorce court.

Only one time have I ever been a witness in a trial. One day I was in the church building where I preached. My wife had our car and no one would have known I was in the building. New shingles were being put on the roof, but no workmen were there at that time. I heard a noise on the roof, looked out through a door, and a thief was removing squares of shingles from the roof to his pickup truck. I jotted down his license number, called the police, they came, he was arrested, and I confronted him outside the building. He was brought to trial and, having a prior conviction for theft and being on probation, was sent to prison.

I have always had convictions about marriages and for whom I would “say a wedding ceremony” (there is a big difference, you know, between a wedding ceremony and a marriage!). I have always refused to say a wedding service for anyone who had been divorced, unless the couple involved had been previously married to each other, had realized their error and sin, and were remarrying (and had not been married to anyone else in the interim). I’ve never wanted to help someone enter a sinful, God-forbidden marriage relationship. I have sometimes refused to participate in a wedding service when I knew the people involved and was convinced that their marriage would be “a disaster waiting to happen,” doomed to failure before it ever really began.

Several years ago a couple talked with me, separately, one at a time, a divorced husband and wife who were planning to remarry. They had several children. He had committed adultery and she had divorced him “for adultery” (although the legal decree said “irreconcilable differences” in this “no-fault divorce” state). After the divorce, he married the woman with whom he was committing adultery and lived with her a number of years. Meanwhile the wife, who had divorced him for adultery, met and married a man who had never been married and had a child with him. At the time they talked with me, the man had left his adulterous second wife, moved back to this city, and wanted his first wife to divorce her husband and remarry him. She wanted to do so as she “was not happy” and “had loved him all the time and would never quit loving him,” the father of her children. I told him that he had no right to remarry her because she had divorced him for adultery, and the guilty divorced adulterer/adulteress is not permitted a remarriage by the Lord, even to his previous first wife. He was a “guilty, put away adulterer.” But they went to another preacher, he told them that was the thing for them to do, to remarry, that being the first husband and first wife and the parents of their children, and even though he had been divorced for adultery, that God would have them to remarry to solve their marital problems. So they did, and became members of the congregation where this preacher is preaching. The second husband, whom this woman had scripturally married and who was the father of a child with her, was forsaken and left “high and dry.” His scriptural wife left him for another man, an adulterer!

I have always made it a practice to talk with a couple prior to agreeing to participate in their wedding. This gives me opportunity to learn what their concepts and convictions are about being married, and discuss questions they may have regarding their plans, purposes, conduct, responsibilities, etc., in their anticipated union. The couple may have been Christians whom I thought needed to be reminded of our Father’s will regarding proper attitudes and behavior toward a husband or wife, as taught in Ephesians 5:22-33, 1 Peter 3:1-7, and Colossians 3:18-21. It might have been that a Christian was going to be married to an unbeliever and I wanted a chance to study God’s will with the unbeliever. Sometimes I have baptized such a one before the marriage; sometimes I have baptized such a one after the

marriage; and sometimes I have not baptized such a one at all. Many times I have refused to participate in a wedding when I had concluded that the believer was making a grave error in his/her choice of a mate.

I have never made it a “conscientious scruple” that a believer cannot be married an unbeliever. In some instances it is highly unwise; in some it is not. Since marriage is authorized by God, whose offspring we are (Acts 17:28-29), for the entire human race (Heb. 13:4), for the procreation of children in an honorable birth (Gen. 1:26-28; 3:20), for the moral purity of individuals (1 Cor. 7:1-9), and since the relationship between a believer and an unbeliever in marriage is regulated (1 Cor. 7:12-24; 1 Pet. 3:1-2), I cannot conclude it is a *sin* against God and his holy will. There is no passage of Scripture in the Testament which says so. If the marriage itself is sinful, a believer to an unbeliever, then to abide in the relationship is a *sin*. Yet, both Paul and Peter, inspired apostles, gave instructions regarding such marriages, to continue and maintain them, and told the people to abide in their marriage and try to convert their companion to Jesus Christ, thus saving the soul from sin and death. The ideal in marriage is two believers (“heirs together of the grace of life,” 1 Pet. 3:7) being husband and wife together, that their prayers and service to God be not hindered, each helping the other to serve the Lord and to do their best for the Lord and their fellows, preparing for death and eternal life in heaven.

Four of the nicest, best, most faithful women I have ever known in my lifetime, four sisters in the flesh and in Christ, all married unbelievers and all four of them converted their husbands. One of those sisters and her husband are now deceased. Two of the women are now widows, their husbands having died in the faith and in hope of eternal life. One sister still has her husband this side of eternity, to comfort and care for her, to worship God and serve him together. Believers should always earnestly try to convert their intended husband/wife *before* the marriage. True believers, beginning their lives together in Christ in the marriage, will save themselves many differences, distresses, and problems in their marriage. Where the unbeliever is obstinate and ugly in spirit, refuses to consider God’s word and to study it, then the believer, by all means, should refuse to marry such a one. Disaster awaits if you do, when all the tell-tale warnings and signs of impending doom are so visibly evident and apparent.

I have seen, as most older Christians have, some of the kindest and loveliest marriages possible, between a believer and an unbeliever. In such marriages, the believer is free, without any hinderances, to worship and serve God, obey Jesus, do his/her duties to God and their fellow-man, and prepare for death and eternity. And some of the ugliest, cruelest, most merciless and vicious marriages and divorces have been between Christians. In one place we lived, when I was in my early years of preaching, I said the wedding service for two of the finest looking people, a young man and young woman, members of the church. Yet, within a couple of years or so, they were fussing, “cussing,” fuming, fighting, slapping, hitting, and committing adultery. Their parents were Christians. They had been “raised in the church.” They divorced. Both later remarried. I don’t know whether they are still living or are dead. One thing I do know: if they did not repent and change their ways, they will go to hell.

Being in the church and associated with brethren, Christians, all these years, most of the marriage problems, separations, divorces, and remarriages, about which I have any knowledge and know somewhat of the details, are among Christians. Being a Christian does not entirely insulate one from marriage problems! There is hardly a family anymore, or a congregation of the Lord’s people, who do not have, or have had, severe marriage and divorce problems. We cannot make people, even our own spouses, children, and brethren, do right. All we can do is to teach the word of the Lord to them and live a godly and sober life. Sometimes we have to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11), even in our own family and/or the congregation where we preach, serve as an elder, and are members.

Years ago I received a letter from a preacher’s wife, telling me of her husband’s adulterous affair with a woman in the church. He wanted a divorce so he could marry his girl friend. This wife refused to agree to a divorce. After many meetings with brethren in that area, and entreaties and prayers, he repented, quit his adultery, resumed his marriage, and some time later began preaching again. Then, within some three years, his wife, who had written me complaining about her husband’s infidelity, began “having an affair” with a man in a congregation nearby. She decided to divorce her husband “for adultery,” his adultery against her several years before, which she had supposedly forgiven and had received him again as her husband. She obtained her divorce but not on the basis of his past adultery. The divorce decree from the civil court was written “irreconcilable differences.” Sin finds a home even in the bodies and minds of

God's own children. This couple had been married some twenty or more years and had children. The children suffered greatly from their parents' sins, as did the brethren in that area, due to the hurt and harm inflicted upon them by this immoral, ungodly conduct.

We need to realize that God's will must reign supreme in our lives. We must obey his laws in all facets of our existence, our marriages and our families being the most intimate of all of life's relationships and responsibilities. His laws regarding this basic human entity, the family, are clear and sensible. Men complicate, obscure, pervert, and nullify, in the minds of people, God's will with all their additions and opinions, binding where God did not bind and loosing where God did not loose. The only scriptural and consistent course anyone can follow is to tell people four truths: (1) marriage is for life, a lifetime covenant and commitment, (2) death is the only honorable, godly way to ever dissolve a marriage, (3) a husband or wife can "repudiate, reject, divorce" (Greek: *apoluo*) his/her companion *only for adultery*, (4) and only the innocent, moral, faithful-to-the-marriage -vows has the right of remarriage (the guilty, adulterous husband/wife does not have such a concession from the Lord). When we get into areas of opinions as who files for divorce in the civil courts, who gets the divorce decree in civil courts, what does the paperwork and divorce decree say, and invent such phrases as "mental marriage," "mental divorce," "waiting game," "second putting away," "the innocent, put away person cannot remarry," etc., we solve no marriage problems, we help no one in their troubled marriages, we bind where Jesus did not bind, and make no scriptural contribution to the cause of truth and salvation of souls. I recently heard of a church planning to appoint a committee of men to "investigate" the divorces of some members of the congregation. There is hardly a church anymore which does not have divorced people in the membership. If brethren begin doing such a thing, then witch-hunting and anarchy, suspicions and hatreds, and divided churches will result. Some people will be driven from Christ and the church who have a scriptural right and privilege from the Lawgiver himself to be citizens of his kingdom. Not all divorced people are wrong and in sin. Some of them are scripturally divorced and remarried. Jesus, our Lord and Master, gave such a right and permission. Such ones have a right to be God's child and to prepare themselves for death and eternal life in heaven. No man has a right to forbid innocent, moral, faithful, divorced people from engaging in a scriptural, moral, innocent remarriage (1 Tim. 4:3). (To be continued)