

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO THE
CURRENT TREND OF DIVORCE AND
REMARriage IN THE CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

The remarriage of divorcees is the Jezebel of the Church today. As recorded in Revelation 2, the church in Thyatira was commended by the Lord for their fabulous works of love, service, faith, and patience, but they allowed immorality, depicted by Jezebel's activities, to take hold. Even though it is clearly stated that Thyatira's latest deeds were greater than at first, Jesus was more concerned about her state of immorality, and He threatened to kill her children for her non-repentance. Any hint of complacent immorality in any church should be resolved expeditiously.

The world has seen marital failures since the early chapters of Genesis, and marital failures will possibly continue even into the Millennial Kingdom. Divorce, by itself, however, is not a do-or-die issue for the church today. It is the remarriage of divorcees that makes the Church ineffective in its attempts to positively influence an ever-increasing immoral society. The Church cannot even begin to challenge the growing homosexual agenda that is sweeping through all levels of society these days when it condones and even promotes adultery within its own ranks by unashamedly remarrying divorcees? The Church may not be able to escape this reality of life, but it needs to contain it, if not restrict it in some capacity more than what it has over the years.

This paper looks at this issue scripturally and then observationally through the studies of other pastoral individuals, through interviews of local church leaders, and through a survey that has reached across the nation. The purpose of this dissertation is to identify specific steps for churches to begin the process to restore its testimony and effectiveness. This repair process, however, will not be accomplished without considerable time and possibly first paying a hefty price. After all, John the Baptist lost his head over this marriage issue when he challenged two unbelievers (King Herod and Herodias) for their unlawful marriage. How much more seriously should the church take the covenant of marriage amongst its own congregants.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	ii
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. HYPOTHESES AND GOALS.....	3
2.1 Hypothesis #1: Old Testament Approach to Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage	5
2.1.1 Marriage within the Old Testament	5
2.1.2 Divorce and Adultery within the Old Testament	10
2.1.3 Remarriage within the Old Testament	16
2.2 Goal #1: Ezra's Solution to Resolve Unlawful Marriages in the Old Testament	17
2.3 Hypothesis #2: New Testament Approach to Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage	23
2.3.1 New Testament Restrictions on Divorce and Remarriage	44
2.3.2 The Remarriage of Divorcees Is the Jezebel of the Church Today	46
2.4 Goal #2: To Reverse the Trend, Churches Must First Acknowledge the Problem and Begin Adhering to Biblical Mandates and Principles	54
2.5 Hypothesis #3: Expect to Pay a Steep Price for Challenging Sin in the Camp	58
2.6 Goal #3: Options to Lessen the Price to be Paid.....	61
3. METHODS	65
3.1 Research Question Synopsis (Includes problem, purpose, and research questions).....	65
3.2 Research Design Overview	68
3.3 Population(s)	69
3.3.1 Theoretical Population – Nationwide Survey	69
3.3.2 Accessible Population – Survey of Local Church Leaders.....	70
3.3.3 Personal Interviews of Local Church Leaders	70
3.4 Sample and Delimitations	71
3.5 Limitations of Generalization	74
3.6 Research Method	74
3.7 Instrumentation	76
3.8 Research Procedures	77
4. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS	78
4.1 Compilation Protocol and Measures	78
4.2 Demographic and Sample Data	78
4.3 Data Analysis and Findings	79
4.3.1 Nationwide and Local (Kentucky) Survey Results.....	79
4.3.2 Local Interview Results	97
4.4 Evaluation of the Research Design	99
5. CONCLUSIONS	101
5.1 Research Purpose (verbatim restatement from chapter one)	103
5.2 Research Questions	105
5.3 Research Conclusions	106
5.4 Research Implications	108
5.5 Research Applications	111
5.6 Research Limitations	112
5.7 Further Research	113

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY	114
7. ENDNOTES.....	115

List of Figures

Figure 3-1. Sample of Survey Question 4 – Do you believe divorce and/or remarriage is more justifiable following the salvation of one or both of the spouses?	72
Figure 4-1. Survey Question 1 – What is your church’s position on Divorce/Remarriage?	80
Figure 4-2. Survey Question 2 – What is your church’s position on the remarriage of divorcees?	81
Figure 4-3. Survey Question 3 – Do you avoid preaching and/or teaching on divorce and remarriage?	82
Figure 4-4. Survey Question 4 – Do you believe divorce and/or remarriage is more justifiable following the salvation of one or both of the spouses?.....	83
Figure 4-5. Survey Question 5 – Does your church allow Pastors/Elders/Ministers to be divorced and remarried?	85
Figure 4-6. Survey Question 6 – Does your church allow Deacons to be divorced and remarried?	86
Figure 4-7. Survey Question 7 – Do you perceive your church being able to reverse the current high divorce rate?	87
Figure 4-8. Survey Question 8 – What do you see as the predominant reason for divorce?	88
Figure 4-9. Survey Question 9 – What do you see as the predominant reason to justify remarrying a divorcee?	89
Figure 4-10. Survey Question 10 – About how many couples in your church are divorced and remarried (Percentage)?	90
Figure 4-11. Survey Question 11 – Have you or other ministers in your church within the past 12 months performed a marriage for a couple where at least one of the spouses was divorced with their previous spouse still living?.....	91
Figure 4-12. Survey Question 12 – Within your church, do you see second marriages being better than the first marriage?	92
Figure 4-13. Survey Question 13 – How many times have you preached or heard someone preach on divorce and remarriage within the past 12 months?.....	93
Figure 4-14. Survey Question 14 – If you were to preach or teach on divorce and remarriage would you incur pressure from church members to desist?	94
Figure 4-15. Survey Question 15 – Do you acknowledge that remarriage of a divorcee while a previous spouse is still living makes their new marriage adulterous in God’s eyes?.....	95
Figure 4-16. Survey Question 16 – Do you see the remarriage of divorcees violating 1 Corinthians 7:11 (“...remain single or be reconciled”)?	96

List of Tables

Table 2-1. New Testament Usage of Adultery.	11
Table 2-2. Common Views on Divorce and Remarriage.....	24
Table 4-1. Survey Question #4 – Sample Data.....	79
Table 5-1. Common Agreements and Disagreements Amongst Church Leaders on Varying Aspects of Divorce and Remarriage.	109

Attachments

Attachment A: Divorce and Remarriage Survey Questionnaire

Attachment B: Survey Responses – Tabular (sorted by state)

Attachment C: Interview Results – Tabular

**Attachment D: Southern Baptist Convention Resolution to Restore the Church's
Testimony in Light of Divorce and Remarriage Issues**

Attachment E: Scripture Index

Note. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture references are taken from the Holy Bible, New American Standard Bible® Copyright © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the U.S. Supreme Court legalized homosexual marriages nationwide in 2015 Christian churches in America are now faced with two major challenges as never before. First, churches need to assess how they can improve their diminished influence in society to hopefully restore morality to a level that prevents God from having to take drastic actions against the nation as He once did against Noah's generation, against Sodom and Gomorrah, against the ancient Canaanite civilizations, and even against His own people, Israel. Second, churches have to be prepared to provide proper biblical counsel to those within same-sex unions and marriages who see the need to escape that lifestyle after coming to Christ.

Fortunately, the arm of God is not so short that He cannot save those in sin's deepest clutches. Envision, for example, a transgender lesbian in a same-sex marriage who comes to Christ having "her kids" and the other "her kids" and "their kids" embroiled in an alternative lifestyle. A pastor or other Christian counselor would need to properly wield the principles of the Bible in such a way to compassionately show and walk the new believer through the legal and social quagmire which would result from coming to Christ and deciding to follow Christ in every aspect. Just saying, "Go and sin no more" fails to bring hope and comfort and to resolve the varied legal, social, familial, emotional, and physical issues associated with possibly separating from or divorcing a homosexual partner. Tumultuous issues include more than just determining appropriate alimony or palimony payments and resolving custody and visitation rights with any children. Issues could also include forsaking the alternative lifestyle community where they were once warmly received and embraced, and possibly reversing any transgender surgeries before moving on with the rest of one's newly-found Christian life.

The first question to ask is, "How did a person or even a society that once lived within a

God-fearing nation get to the point where they accept transgender and homosexual unions and marriages as normal and legal? Unfortunately, the blame for this dilemma could easily fall at the doorstep of the Christian church. Why? Because the Church, by and large, has lost its testimony and ability to positively influence society since it condones and actually promotes adultery within its own ranks by remarrying divorcees.

The rest of this dissertation looks at how the remarriages of divorcees create adulterous events and relationships, and how churches need to grasp the dilemma this invokes. Eventually, churches need to identify and implement steps in a loving and gracious way to restore its reputation for being the “pillar and support” of sound doctrine and teachings (1 Timothy 3:15) without wrongfully alienating those impacted by divorce and by the remarriage of divorcees. Those Christians who have been through the heartache of a failed marriage have a lot to share to hopefully prevent or circumvent others from incurring similar heartache.

Even God, Himself, is divorced, as recorded in Jeremiah 3:8, when He handed Israel, His betrothed, a bill of divorcement; and Joseph contemplated divorcing his wife, Mary, who was pregnant with his stepchild, Jesus, the Savior of the world (Matthew 1:19). So, God has an affinity for those contemplating or recovering from a divorce. Likewise, the church, needs to have grace without sacrificing its moral fiber while handling divorced people within its midst.

This dissertation also lays out how a survey, which has reached across the United States, provides a snapshot in time of divorce and remarriage within many churches and compares that information to churches within a small, relatively-conservative, county in America, the author's county of residence in Bullitt County, Kentucky. This information will be used to assess the level of urgency for churches to respond, and devise ways to potentially reduce the escalating divorce trend and the more devastating trend of remarrying divorcees.

[Here is a popular section that identifies what several leading preachers and theologians believe about divorce and remarriage.]

2.3 Hypothesis #2: New Testament Approach to Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

There should be some empathy shown to the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus' day for having questions regarding marriage, divorce, adultery, and remarriage. After all, as seen in section 2.1, the Mosaic Law had a different judgment stick depending if one was male or female, Jew or Gentile, free or slave, married or single. The death penalty was levied against some sexual sins but not against others. When Jesus came on the scene, He said the Jews, when they divorced their wives, forced their wives to commit adultery (Matthew 5:32), for they had to get remarried, presumably, just to survive. To start this section, several assumptions need stating:

1. There are no contradictions in Scripture;
2. God's plan for marriage is to be monogamous, intimate, hetero-sexual, and a permanent indissoluble covenantal union while both parties are physically alive on the earth;
3. What God has joined together, man is not to separate; and
4. Anything outside of God's ideal plan for marriage is adulterous.

Today in the New Testament era there are predominantly four typical views surrounding divorce and remarriage as depicted in Table 1-1, and none of them render the death penalty. The most conservative view is no divorce and no remarriage for any reason. The next view is that divorce is biblically allowable, but remarriage is not allowable under any condition when it causes an adulterous event, and this is the position of this dissertation. Third, divorce and remarriage are allowed for certain reasons, to include abuse, abandonment, and infidelity. Fourth, divorce and remarriage are allowed for any and all reasons to show grace and mercy. Each of these viewpoints have their staunch proponents. Some are leading pastors, teachers, and

theologians such as Tony Evans, John MacArthur, Charles Swindoll, David Jeremiah, John Piper, Jay Adams, Wayne House, Mark Straus, Gordon Wenham, William Heth, Craig Keener, Carl Laney, Thomas Edgar, Larry Richards, and David Instone-Brewer.

Table 1-1. Common Views on Divorce and Remarriage.

Common Views on D&R	Who Holds to Which View	Modern Day Proponents
1.No Divorce or Remarriage for any reason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Church Fathers up to the Reformation (~1500 AD) 	G. Wenham, C. Laney, J. Piper; W. Heth (initially, but he eventually migrated to positions 3 and 4 below), R. O'Neil (this author)
2.Divorce allowed but no Remarriage except for Jewish-defined porneia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most Catholic churches • Most legalistic-type churches such as Independent Baptists 	
3.Divorce and Remarriage allowed for certain reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • J. Calvin, M. Luther, and other Reformed-era leaders after 1500 AD 	T. Evans, J. MacArthur, C. Swindoll, J. Adams, W. House, M. Strauss, T. Edgar, L. Richards
4.Divorce and Remarriage allowed for any reason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most liberal leaning churches, including major denominations 	D. Jeremiah, W. Heth D. Instone-Brewer

NOTE: I am in the process of turning this dissertation into a book.

I will be happy to provide a copy of my dissertation free for the asking.

Send a request to me at: rod.oneil@twc.com

Blessings,

Rod O'Neil, D.Min.
