

Divorce And Church Leaders
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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

The volume of messages generated by the last two newsletters on "Divorce and Remarriage," has surpassed all expectations. Many of you wrote about the pain of your difficult marital situation. I shared some of your messages with my dear wife, Anna, because she does a better job at remembering your requests in our evening prayer.

During the past few weeks, my wife has been telling me how much she would like to pray and counsel with those of you who are hurting. I asked her last night before our worship if I could mention in this newsletter that you could call her at our home phone number (616) 471-2915. She reassured me that she would be glad to listen, pray, and counsel with you. Since I am leaving tomorrow, Thursday, August 31, for two weeks of lecturing in Europe, you do not need to worry about getting me on the phone. My wife is home most of the time, and you should not have any problem reaching her. You will find her to be a very sympathetic, compassionate, and godly woman. She must be godly to be able to put up with me for the past 40 years of marriage. (Please LAUGH!).

A special note of thanks to all of you who wrote to express your appreciation for the attempt I have made to exegete the biblical texts on divorce and to apply them to our present situation. The messages received come from people of different professions: Bible teachers, pastors, doctors, layers, salespersons, clerks, housewives, and students.

Let me share with you one message that comes from "Mark Scrutton" <mhscru01@louisville.edu>. He wrote:

"Dear Sam,

I've read your writings on many occasions. All that I have read I consider inspired because of the profound reasoning you provide. This last two newsletters, however, are a real masterpiece of your problem/solution style of writing. You led my thinking step-by-step through the logical arguments that would arise, and the solution that answers these in love. While I've contended for these same points, nowhere have I seen them more eloquently expressed as in these newsletters. Thank you!

I've been following this debate with some anxiety since the GC in Toronto. If only we all could heed the 'voice of reason' that you portrayed in this document. . . .

Your servant in Christ.....Mark"

Notes of thanks like this one from Mark, mean a lot to me, because they help me to forget some of the "nasty" messages I receive from those who go as far as questioning whether I am "an SDA at all anymore," because I dare to submit interpretations of biblical texts, which differ somewhat from the traditional Adventist interpretations.

May I remind my detractors that for me to be an Adventist means to be a seeker of truth, and not a defender of church traditions. I grew up in Rome, Italy, under the shadow of the Vatican wall, where I was constantly told that Scripture must be interpreted according to the "*magisterium ecclesiae*," that is, "the teaching authority of the church." The result of this method has been the perpetration of heresies that have done untold damage to the cause of Christ and of His people throughout the ages. As Adventists we cannot afford to fall in the same trap. We need to have the courage to constantly reexamine our traditional views in the light of the teachings of the Word of God. By so doing we can show to the world that we are not a "cult," but a people committed to the teachings of the Bible.

“IF I WERE THE DEVIL”

George Knight's talk "If I Were the Devil," delivered at the GC session, has stimulated considerable discussion and reflection. This must be seen as a positive element of the speech, especially since some presentations put the saints to sleep.

While Knight in his speech portrays a more "conservative devil" who attempts to undermine the Adventist church by attacking traditional polices and practices, John McConnell <milliersvp@juno.com>, one of our subscribers proposes "a liberal devil," who undermines the church by promoting his liberal agenda. The end-result is the same: the weakening of the church. I thought you might be interested to read this liberal version of the devil, which I am posting with minor editorial changes.

“Ten Ways a Liberal Devil can Destabilize the Adventist Church”

1. If I were the devil I would denigrate the musical taste of teenagers with voo-doo type gospel rock music so that traditional church music and great hymns are considered boring. I would have youth leaders promote this type of music for the worship service with the excuse that it is the only way to "hold the youth in the church."
2. If I were the devil I would divide the church over the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood. I would cause pseudo-intellectual theologians to encourage modern Eves to push for equal rights in the ministry. I would cause wimpish church administrators to acquiesce to these demands in direct opposition to the official action of the world church.
3. If I were the devil I would introduce divisive forms of worship, especially celebration and pentecostal type of services that stimulates people physically, rather than elevating them spiritually. I would subsidize young avant-garde pastors to attend celebration-type seminars conducted by non-Adventist lecturers. This has been a very effective method of splitting up churches.
4. If I were the devil I would influence church leaders to embrace ecumenism and become buddy-buddy with other church leaders in order to improve the Adventist church image in the religious world. This can result in the blurring of the distinction between the Remnant Church and Babylon.
5. If I were the devil I would espouse the higher-critical method of Bible interpretation and thereby alter the time honored Adventist commitment to the authority of Scripture as the basis of faith and practice.
6. If I were the devil I would enamor the youth with the amateurish dramatization of trivial Bible topics instead of engaging in serious Bible study.
7. If I were the devil I would gauge the success of evangelistic campaigns by number of baptisms, and measure the success of the evangelistic thrust of the world church by numbers of converts. This emphasis on numbers would encourage the admittance of many new members into the church without proper instruction in the doctrines and beliefs of the church. This can result in widespread apostasy and/or backsliding.
8. If I were the devil I would introduce into the church manual non-biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage and thus weaken the sanctity and permanence of the marriage covenant.
9. If I were the devil I would redefine sin as a broken relationship. Thus people would not feel the need for repentance and reform. People would not consider the Law as a guide, and their assurance of salvation would be based on a warm, fuzzy feeling of love for Jesus.

10. If I were the devil I would introduce into the worship service elements of the entertainment world such as applause, drama, dancing, and other theatrical features that can destroy the solemn dignity and reverence appropriate to the worship of the Almighty.

In conclusion, if I were the devil I would encourage the Seventh-day Adventist church to think, live, and act as the rest of the world, so that ultimately her identity and mission would be largely lost.

MILLENNIUM PEACE SUMMIT OF RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL LEADERS - August 28-31, New York

A global summit bringing 1,000 religious leaders to the United Nations opened on August 28 with an afternoon procession into the General Assembly and sessions all the next day. The Summit then moved for two more days to the nearby Waldorf Astoria hotel.

The Summit is organized by an "independent coalition" of interfaith leaders. The religious leaders are expected to issue a Declaration for World Peace and agree to some form of a permanent International Advisory Council of Religious and Spiritual Leaders. Mr. Turner, the summit's honorary chairman, has promised full live coverage by CNN.

The purpose of the Summit to engage religious leaders of all faiths in promoting peace in our world is praiseworthy. After all the root of most recent conflicts, not only in Palestine, but also in the Balkans, Ireland, India, and Pakistan to name a few, is religious. We live in a world where often religions have become weapons to crusade against those who believe differently. At such critical time it is imperative for world religious leaders to come together and commit themselves to promote peace.

There seems to be also another agenda, which gives us reason for concern. The United Nations seems determined to create a modified Judeo-Christian religion with bits and pieces of other religions merged into one form of worship. A global form of worship that will only permit acknowledgment of one god, according to a humanist ideal that uses multiculturalism as its basic tenet.

This trend deserves close attention, because we live at a time when denominational divisions are becoming less important. People tend to choose churches not so much for their beliefs but for their programs that makes them feel good. This new emphasis on religion as a physical, social, and emotional experience, opens the door for the acceptance of a world religion, with bits and pieces of all religions, since all of them offer some forms of physical, social, and religious experience.

DIVORCE AND CHURCH LEADERS by **Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D., Prof. of Theology,** **Andrews University**

In the previous two newsletters we looked at the biblical teachings on divorce and remarriage in general. No mention was made of what the Bible has to say about divorce and remarriage by church leaders. Yet, this is an important point, because church leaders serve as role models to their congregations.

Sometime ago I spoke in a church where the last two pastors had an affair, which eventually caused them to divorce their wives. The first elder told me that what the pastors did became contagious. Over a period of two years about 30 families broke up in this 700 members congregations. This example helps us appreciate why the Bible holds church leaders to higher standards.

1. Paul on Divorce of Church Leaders

On account of time restraints, I will limit my study to Paul's instructions regarding church leaders as found in 1 Timothy 3:2 and the parallel passage in Titus 1:6. This means that this study is much shorter than previous ones. For some this will be a welcome relief. For a change you will be able to read the whole newsletter

In explaining the qualifications for church leadership, Paul specifically mention the marriage status of those aspiring to become church leaders: "Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife" (1 Tim 3:2; cf. Titus 1:6). "Let deacons be the husband of one wife, and let them manage their children and their households well" (1 Tim 3:12).

The basic qualifications given by Paul for the church office of elder (or overseer) and deacon were designed to enable Timothy in Ephesus and Titus on Crete to appoint church leaders qualified to serve in such offices. The first qualification for the office of elder is that the man must be "above reproach." His blameless lifestyle is to serve as a role model to the congregation and is to offer no reason for criticism in the community.

The first important aspect of his role modeling is his marital status, which Paul defines as "husband of one wife" (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6). This qualification occurs both in 1 Timothy and Titus immediately after the demand for blamelessness thus indicating the prominence Paul gives to the marital status of a church leader.

The Greek words translated "husband of one wife" can be rendered literally as "one-wife-man." This short phrase has been the subject of considerable discussion. Did Paul mean that a church leader should be married only to one woman at a time or only once during his lifetime? Did Paul intend to exclude from church leadership *polygamists*, that is, men married to several wives or *digamists*, that is, men married twice or more legally?

Exclusion of Polygamists. Some, as John Calvin, have understood the phrase "husband of one wife" to exclude polygamists from church leadership.¹ This interpretation is discredited by two main considerations. First, there was no need for this qualification since no Christian, whether church leader or not, was allowed to practice polygamy. Second, in New Testament times polygamy was generally outlawed in the empire and thus it hardly needed insistence by Paul.²

Exclusion of Digamists. The most plausible meaning of the phrase "husband of one wife" appears to be "married only once." This is in fact the rendering of the New Revised Standard Version. According to this view, divorce and remarriage would disqualify a man from the office of elder and deacon. Paul would be stressing the importance of appointing to church leadership only men whose marital status was beyond suspect by having been married only once. Several considerations favor this interpretation.

The priests in the Old Testament were enjoined to uphold a higher marriage standard by marrying only a virgin, and not “a widow, or one divorced, or a woman who has been defiled, or a harlot” (Lev 21:14; cf. 21:7). This Old Testament precedent supports the New Testament higher marriage standards for elders and deacons. Elsewhere I have shown that even the requirement for church leaders to be “abstinent” (1 Tim 3:2) finds its precedent in the Old Testament strict prohibition against the use of alcoholic beverages by the priests (Lev 10:9).³

The construction of the phrase without article “*mias gunaikos andra*—one-wife-man” emphasizes the moral character of the individual as being totally committed to one woman. Such a total commitment is best exemplified by faithfulness to one’s spouse “till death doeth us part.” In an age when the marriage bond was lightly regarded and commonly dishonored, Paul emphasizes that a church leader must be an example of marital fidelity. Such a fidelity would exclude the possibility of divorce and remarriage.

This may be inferred also from the requirement that a woman enrolled in the official order of widows was to have been “the wife of one husband” (1 Tim 5:9). In Greek, the phrase corresponds to “the husband of one wife.” Since the widows enrolled in the ministry of the church were to have been married only once, it seems safe to assume that the same qualification applied to the office of elder. The linguistic similarity between the two phrases (“husband of one wife” and “wife of one husband”) strongly suggest that in both instances the person was to have been married only once.

Historical Support. This view was commonly held in early Christianity. Tertullian, for example, writing at the beginning of the third century says: “Among us the prescript is more fully and more carefully laid down, that they who are chosen into the sacerdotal order must be men of one marriage; which rule is so rigidly observed that I remember some removed from their office for digamy.”⁴

Tertullian then argues that the same rule should apply to the laity because in a sense all Christians are priests. While his extension to the laity of the “one marriage” principle may have been influenced by his Montanistic views, his reference to the rigid application of such a principle to the clergy, provides historical support for the “married only once” interpretation of the phrase “husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6).

Another example can be found in the fourth century collection of ecclesiastical laws, known as *The Apostolic Canons*. The seventeenth canon establishes that “He who has been twice married after his baptism, or has a concubine, cannot be made a bishop, or presbyter, or deacon.”⁵ The same rule appears in the related work, known as *The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, which states: “We have already said, that a bishop, a presbyter, and a deacon, when they are constituted, must be but once married, whether their wives be alive or whether they be dead.”⁶ Historical testimonies such as these strongly support the “married only once” interpretation of the Pauline requirement “husband of one wife.”

Objections. Some object to this interpretation because it reflects a low view of marriage. The prohibition of a second marriage after the death of one’s spouse would seem to make marriage almost a necessary evil that can be allowed only once. Such a view of marriage is contradicted by the Scripture which presents marriage as a divinely established, honorable institution.

However, this objection ignores that the restriction against a second marriage applies not to Christians in general but to elders and deacons in particular. Their leadership responsibilities place some restrictions on their personal liberty in the area of marriage. While a lay member is permitted to remarry after the death of his or her spouse (1 Cor 7:39; 1 Tim 5:14), a church leader is advised not to remarry.

The reason for the “married only once” requirement could be that a second marriage after the death of one’s spouse, would entail additional family responsibilities, especially if children are born to the second marriage. These additional obligations could certainly limit a church leader’s opportunities for ministering to the needs of the congregation. A man who prefers to establish a second family through a second marriage at the expenses of greater opportunities for serving Christ may lack the total commitment to Christ required of a church leader.

Another objection to the “married only once” interpretation is that it allegedly makes the *past marital history* more important than *one’s present character*. “It is possible,” writes Stanley A. Ellisen, “to have a good marital history of a single marriage and have a ‘cat-calling’ character of wandering affections at the same time. On the other hand, it is also possible to have a sorrowful marital history of a broken marriage while having a personal character that is above reproach.”⁷

No one will dispute the truth that the present moral character of a man is more important than his past sorrowful marital history. The problem with this reasoning is that it creates an alternative that is not applicable to a church leader. We have seen that the qualifications for church leadership require both a good *past marital history* and a *present blameless moral character*. The reason for this high standard is that a church leader serves as a living model to insiders and outsiders of Christian principles and practices.

In summary, both the Old and New Testaments uphold the principle of high marriage standards for church leaders (Lev 21:7, 14-15; 1 Tim 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6). In the New Testament church the elders and deacons must stand before the congregation as role models of blameless lifestyle, especially by being the “husband of one wife,” that is to say, married only once and totally devoted to one’s wife. This excludes the possibility for church leaders to divorce, remarry or to lust after other women. The standard is admittedly high, but God could hardly allow a lesser standard from those who have been called to give spiritual leadership to His church. To allow a man who has been divorced and remarried to serve as the spiritual leader of a congregation means to tempt its members to follow his bad example by divorcing their spouses and remarrying, if the occasion arises.

The foregoing discussion of the marriage qualifications for church leaders has served to corroborate the principle that Christian marriage is a permanent, lifelong union, which admits no divorce and remarriage. This principle is to be upheld especially by church leaders because their lifestyle and teaching serve as role model for many to follow.

ENDNOTES

1. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, 1948), p. 77.
2. See Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization: Caesar and Christ* (New York, 1944), p. 396.
3. See Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI., 1989), pp. 206-210.
4. Tertullian, *On Exhortation to Chastity 7*, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1972), vol. IV, p. 54.
5. *The Ecclesiastical Canons of the Holy Apostles 17*, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1970), vol. VII, p. 501.
6. *The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles 6, 17*, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1970), vol. VII, p. 457.
7. Stanley A. Ellisen, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church* (Grand Rapids, 1980), p. 83.

UPCOMING SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of my upcoming weekend SEMINARS on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Lifestyle. Each seminar consists of three presentations: Friday evening at 7:30 p. m., Sabbath morning at 11:00 a. m., and Sabbath afternoon at 5:00 p. m. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area.

September 29-30: Vancouver, British Columbia

Location: Westminster SDA Church
Address: 7925 -10th Avenue, Burnaby, BC V3N 2S3
For information call Pastor David Ellis at (504) 524-3838

October 6-7: Colville, Washington

Location: Auditorium Community College of Spokane
Address: 985 S. Elm Street, Colville, WA 99114
For information call Pastor Douglas Pond at (509) 684-5845 or LeeRoy Holmes at (509) 684-3362

A THANK YOU NOTE:

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