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**Six Questions about Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage - Part 1**

By Tal Davis

Several years ago a prominent Christian polling service published a shocking statistical report. The report said surveys indicated that the national divorce rate among Christian responders was essentially the same as those who were not Christian (about 50%). Many pastors and writers (including this one) quoted that number to describe the apparent dire situation of Christian marriages in America.

Since that report's release, several scholars have questioned the report's conclusions based on the way the poll defined "Christian." Glenn T. Stanton, of the Gospel Coalition's FactChecker, for instance, pointed out that the poll defined a "Christian" as anyone who self-identified himself or herself that way. In other words, a person was categorized as a Christian by just saying they were one regardless of what that term meant to them.

Stanton and other researchers found that when people are defined more narrowly by how active they are in a religion, Christian or any other, the divorce rates tend to vary quite a bit. For instance, active Protestants have a much lower rate than do inactive Protestants. The same is true among active Catholics, Jews, evangelicals, Mormons, or what have you. The rate of divorce is inversely proportional to people's commitment to their stated faiths (see: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/09/25/factchecker-divorce-rate-among-christians/> )

Well-known researcher Shaunti Feldhahn goes even further saying that the commonly quoted

50% divorce figure for all marriages is inaccurate. She states in a recent interview, "A subconscious sense of futility about marriage is everywhere, as everything we hear says marriage is 'in trouble.' And while some of the bad news is accurate (for example, 41% of children are born out of wedlock), many of the most demoralizing beliefs just aren't true. For example, the notion that half of all marriages end in divorce or that the divorce rate is the same in the church... neither are anywhere close to true" (see the interview at: <http://www.christianpost.com/news/author-debunks-myths-about-divorce-rates-including-of-churchgoers-119843/>).

In any case, whatever the correct divorce rate may be, the rightness or wrongness of it cannot be gauged by polls and statistics. The only metric that matters is what is taught in the Word of God, the Bible. Indeed, the Bible has a lot to say about the subjects of marriage and divorce. Sad to say, most Christians know little of what is said in the Scriptures about those subjects despite the fact that they may be the most important issues of a person's life, second only to his or her eternal salvation.

In this installment and the next, we will examine and answer the following six key questions that Christians should ask before they get married. These are also important issues for pastors and for leaders of a local church.

1. Should Christians get married and why?
2. Who should get married and is it alright to remain single?
3. Should a husband and wife who are both Christians get divorced?

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4. What about a case of one spouse being a believer and the other not a believer?
5. What about the case of when an unbelieving spouse divorces the believer – is the believer free to remarry?
6. What about the case of two unbelievers who marry and divorce?

In this series we will look at what Jesus said about marriage and divorce. We will also look at the guidelines given by Paul on these issues to the troubled church in Corinth where apparently they were in dire need of direction.

### Question One: Should Christians Get Married and Why?

In Matthew 19:3-12 is recorded Jesus' conversation with a group of Pharisees. They grilled Him about His position on divorce. The ancient rabbis and Jewish sects disagreed on that subject (more about that in the next installment). The Pharisees wanted to put Jesus in the middle of the squabble. Jesus responded by quoting from the creation story. "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." (Matthew 19:4-6 NASB)

Jesus quoted from Genesis 2:24 which is the key to the biblical definition of marriage, "The two shall become one flesh." When one man and one woman (and only a man and a woman) take their marital vows before God and join together in a sexual union, they are, in the eyes of God, "one flesh" and married for life. Jesus saw marriage as critically important and as a sacred

union. He warned that it thus should never be taken lightly or broken. Though He was not married, Jesus blessed the married state. He even performed His first miracle at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11).

The Apostle Paul also was not married, yet he likewise had a positive attitude toward it. Paul wrote his letter to the church in Corinth because of its numerous problems. The congregation was essentially the original dysfunctional church. The people there were engaged in conflicts regarding spiritual gifts, church leadership, money, doctrine, worship, sexual immorality, marriage and divorce (and you thought those kinds of problems only began in the 20th Century). Apparently they were desperate and wrote to Paul for help. The New Testament epistle of 1 Corinthians was his reply.

In chapter 7, verses 1-7, Paul turned his attention to issues about marriage. He begins by stating a moral principle: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." He actually may have been quoting someone else. In any case, he goes on to say that because of "immoralities" let a man have his own wife or each woman have her own husband. He maintains that they should "fulfill duties" to each other (except for special temporary reasons). He is obviously referring to having sexual relations.

He says they should not deprive each other. Apparently some in Corinth were doing just that because they considered themselves too super-spiritual for sex. Note, however, Paul says this is not a command but a concession. Paul says he wished all were like him and unmarried. Paul had a gift of celibacy, something he knew most people do not possess.

The point is, most people probably should get married and that it is a solemn and sacred relationship. That does not mean, however, that a Chris-

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tian man or woman should be constantly on the search for a suitable mate. If it is God's will for someone to marry, He will in His time bring that person into his or her life. As the old saying goes, "Getting married is not a matter of finding the right person, it is a matter of being the right person."

**Question 2: Who Should Get Married and Is it Alright to Remain Single?**

Years ago, when I was a pastor, I knew a man in my church who was at that time in his late thirties and unmarried. He recounted how he often took ribbing from friends and coworkers. He asked me quite seriously, "Is there something wrong with me?" I told him there was nothing wrong with being single.

In 1 Corinthians 7:7 and 8, Paul says, "Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I (NASB)." As we noted above, Paul was single and regarded it as a gift, the spiritual gift of celibacy. He advised those who felt the same to remain that way.

As we indicated, however, not many people have the gift of celibacy. The Roman Catholic Church requires it of all its Priests. That unbiblical requirement has been the basis of many problems in that denomination. (For evangelicals, the need for Priests at all is a problematic issue in and of itself.)

Nonetheless, the clear teaching is that it is alright to be single. Nothing is wrong with it or with those who are single. However, singleness comes with a condition. The single person must remain celibate. Some people think premarital sex is okay since they do not technically commit adultery. Singleness is no excuse for im-

morality (whether heterosexual or homosexual). Any sex outside marriage (fornication) is wrong.

Single Christians should remain celibate, pray for strength to resist sin, and serve God in ways and places that avoid temptations. And, as we pointed out, marriage can only be between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24). Thus, Christians who may have feelings of same-sex attraction should also commit to celibacy and pray for spiritual deliverance from temptation.

But, thank God, Paul does not leave it there. In verse 9 he says that if one does not have the gift of celibacy (and most do not), then it is better to marry than "burn with passion." So to sum it up, it is alright to be and stay single as long one desires, but it is better to marry than sin in lust or premarital relations.

In this section we addressed two significant issues about the biblical concept of marriage. In the next installment we will examine the biblical answers to four questions about divorce and remarriage.



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