

PAPER 2009: Can Divorcees (or Women) Teach?

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Abstract

This paper was written for the AWANA High School program on 1/19/2009 in response to an angry question about a divorced leader (unknown to me). The questioner was **not** satisfied.

"I have questions about divorced leaders teaching the youth. I have objections about this practice based on Biblical understanding of how God hates divorce, the marriage relationship being symbolic of the relationship of Jesus and the Church, very specific Scriptures that state re-marriage is an act of adultery, and the Biblical qualifications of an elder. Does the AWANA ministry remove this person from their position?"

Verses about Divorced Leaders

This is not a complete study. These verses respond to the issue whether a divorced person (or a woman) can teach.

Divorce indeed breaks God's image of the family. Yet, under certain circumstances beyond the control of the believer, a divorce can occur without penalty to the believer's role in the church. One is infidelity (Jesus per Matthew 5:32) and the other is Paul's policy I Cor.7 that if an unbelieving spouse leaves without cause, the believer should let him/her go. In these two cases, the divorced believer is upheld by Jesus and Paul without reproach (I Cor. 7:15)

Such blameless individuals may hold church positions. Paul might add, *"If at all possible, follow God within whatever state you happen to be when you become a believer"* (I. Cor. 7:20)

I and II Timothy refers to the qualifications for a Bishop and Elders and Deacons ... these were not to be polygamous (like the Greeks and pagans) ... hence, one wife. The implication is that the leader should be married only once, but does not rule out remarriage after death of a wife. In that unquestioned case for remarriage, the leader would be married more than one time!

The verse, while not explicitly talking about divorce, can be rightly read between the lines that if a divorced man could not run a small household, how could he shepherd a larger community?

Do These Rules Apply To Teachers?

Some churches combine the pastor-teacher role as a single role ... and therefore extend the criteria for a Bishop/Elder/Deacon to the teachers too. Some churches only allow their deacons to teach (contrary to examples in scripture), and thus hold the teachers to the criteria of the deacons. Still others use I Timothy 5:17 to show that while some elders can also teach, all teachers must be elders and therefore held to the criteria of an elder applies to the teacher.

Paul calls Teachers to account whenever they do not practice what they teach. Jesus did the same with the Pharisees and educated "Teachers of the Law".

However, most roles in the church do not have marriage requirements because, as Paul says, many of us came from a pagan background with a sinful lifestyle before becoming a believer. He reminds his flock when he lists the sins saying "*and such were some of you*", but "*now you are washed clean*" (I Cor. 6:11). No one could ever be a church leader if their pre-Christian sins were appropriate criteria. However, Paul correctly comes down hard upon those after believing, who then use their freedom for libertine activity, up to and including removal.

Divorce Proof our Marriages

Divorce should never happen in Christian families, but it does in 50% of the marriages. Couples get too angry to admit defeat and problems. This occurs right when they need the church more than ever to pull them past the rocks. I keep hearing about divorce AFTER the fact.

We should pray for strong temptation-resistant marriages for our leaders at all levels within the church. Satan is attacking the church exactly at this point. He gets a man pumped up preaching against adultery, and then brings that man down into adultery (Romans 2:22) and God's name, plus the institution of marriage, is blasphemed among the unbelievers (Romans 2:24).

I see divorce especially during the teenage drama years. It could have happened to me. Anne died in 2010 after year #35. However year #19 was dangerous when our teenagers played us off one another. Only by facing the facts head on did we get through that rocky year. We were so proud that we made it to year # 18 and that typical marriage-breakers were long behind us. None of the marriage books warned us about year # 19 as we coasted into the jaws of disaster.

Answer about Women

Some churches do not allow women to teach (at all) ... based upon 1 Tim.2:12 ... including in home schools if they were consistent with their doctrine. Some churches limit women teachers to just teaching younger women/girls based on Titus 2:4. Others, allow women in leadership if they are under the leadership of a man ("*not usurping*"). And then, you have Priscilla (with her husband) teaching men in Acts 18:26 and Romans 16:3.

I add this paragraph with the divorce topic because earnest Christians have different strongly held interpretations about who may teach. It is one reason we have 300+ denominations, and each of them claim the sole "right" interpretation about teachers and women's roles. This is not, as the atheists claim, the reason to jettison the Bible since it causes such strident variations.

Closing

Divorce is brokenness. Divorce is an epidemic in the world (one systemic problem among many). Jesus himself railed against "no-fault" divorce of his day. He would do the same today.

Leaders should model working marriages under God's power (versus under their own strength). Those that flaunt their divorce, or were to be blamed but claim it was no big deal, should relinquish their posts. For the penitent ones (and there are quite a few), each denomination or agency or AWANA club director must evaluate and decide those individual cases.