

begin with the divorcee. It is one thing to accept forgiveness and another to appropriate Romans 8:28 and 29 to our lives. It is inconceivable to most Christians that God knew we would divorce when we married, and further that that experience would actually be a tool for our spiritual development. I have made statements to this effect at singles conferences and the response is nearly always the same. "I'd like to believe that, but—I can't agree that divorce is ever God's will."

It was never God's will for Adam and Eve to sin, yet he knew they would. Long before they partook of the forbidden fruit, God had a plan for salvation. God is desiring to conform us to the image of his dear Son. Romans 8:28 is the key to verse 29. He will use every tool of experience to reshape the vessel which was marred.

It is time for us to recognize that in forgiveness there is restoration and justification. The same just but loving, righteous but merciful, God who demanded admission of sin from David, and repentance, also forgave and restored him. The anointing was not taken from David because of his sin nor was his life less fulfilled or less productive as a result. When we reckon with our total salvation, we begin life anew. Joy replaces sorrow, hope destroys defeat and life becomes a delightful challenge as we allow past mistakes to become present knowledge.

What about divorced ministers?

The question is not divorce. It is not even divorce and remarriage. The question is repentance.

Lin Bachert



Jamie Buckingham

As I sit here this morning in the quietness of my study, I can count at least two dozen well-known ministers—

many of them my personal friends—who have gone through divorce. Some have remarried. Some have stayed in the ministry. Others have slipped into secular work. All are sad cases.

The Episcopal priest who ministered to me when I was baptized in the Holy Spirit has left his wife and married another woman. Now, when I share my testimony, I am reluctant to mention his name. That hurts.

One of the nation's best known evangelists said he had to choose between his wife and the ministry. It seems never to have occurred to him that his wife might be his ministry.

The man whose books stirred the slumbering chords of a dead church and gave us all a look at ourselves, divorced his wife of many years. Now I sit and look at his books, which have meant so much to me, and wonder: was his teaching valid? Can it be trusted, if this results?

An old friend, a medical doctor, wrote of a well-known rehabilitation leader: "About two weeks ago he left his wife, and with this was asked to resign as head of the ministry. We had just completed the purchase of an old downtown church and parsonage which was to be a combined ministry and I was setting up a medical clinic with it. . . ." There was anguish and heartbreak in the doctor's letter.

I think of another minister who was riding the crest of a popularity wave. A mighty preacher, he appeared at all the conventions. Then he divorced his wife, married a young girl from a different racial background and dropped out of sight. Recently he contacted his publisher saying he had "served his sentence of exile" and asked to be reintroduced to the public as an evangelist.

I think of the director of the family relations department of one of the nation's largest denominations who divorced his wife and married a younger woman. I still correspond with his former wife. She prays daily for her ex-husband.

The pastor of a large church in Atlanta recently stepped before his congregation and told them, in tears, that his wife had left him for another man.

Some of the nation's best known
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charismatic teachers are divorced. Their way in life is hard.

It is not my intent to analyze the reasons behind these divorces. However, there are some Kingdom principles which need to be remembered as we relate to these wounded shepherds.

First, very few people recognize the extreme pressures brought against the families of those in public ministry. A recent Knight-Ridder survey shows one out of twenty-five clergy marriages end in divorce. Not bad, considering that almost one out of two ordinary marriages wind up that way. But when a shepherd falls, the entire

He is the only one who shoots it.
community knows—as they seem to know about everything else which goes on in the parsonage. The biggest contributing factor: involvement with another woman (or man). A Methodist survey found that nine out of every ten clergy divorces involved infidelity—and that in nearly every case the minister, rather than his wife, was the offender.

Christians need to realize, however, that the shepherd is “on the point” in spiritual warfare. Satan knows that if he can strike the shepherd the sheep will scatter. If he can shoot down a chief, the warriors will fall into confusion. So, every satanic gun is trained

the only one who shoots it.
on the minister and his family. If he has a weakness, if there is any flaw in his family structure, Satan will find it and exert extreme pressure to bring him down.

When a soldier is shot down in battle we bring him home, pay his hospital bills, decorate him with medals, give him honor and quickly restore him to service. But let some shepherd be lured from the safety of his fold by a tempting siren who claims she needs ministry, only to find himself lost in no man’s land where he loses all sense of direction and does crazy things to his wife and children—and we cast him out of the Kingdom. Why, we need to ask, is a confessed murderer more welcome in our pulpits than a divorced shepherd?

Second, we have no clear scriptural guidelines on this matter. Even the finest Bible scholars argue the points of divorce, remarriage and the place of the fallen minister. In fact, it was one of the burning issues when the scribes broached the subject with Jesus—a subject which Pharisees still love to debate. Jesus never intended for man to use the Scriptures as a hammer and chisel to chip out a set of rules by which we can imprison one another. When Jesus discussed divorce it was not to major on the exceptions, but to drive home the purpose of God in establishing the permanency of the home. What sadness there must be in heaven when God hears his Spirit-filled children using the Scriptures as bows and arrows to shoot down one another.

Third, a distinction must be made between those who divorce, those who divorce and later remarry and those who divorce in order to remarry.

Divorce is the result of sin. It is the public admission of failure. Remarriage, however, is a different situation, for it closes the door on reconciliation.

And divorce in order to remarry is specifically condemned in the Scriptures and may be the line a man crosses whereby he disqualifies himself for public ministry.

Fourth, more is required of those ordained to public ministry than ordinary men and women. The question is asked: “Does God judge his shepherds with a different standard than he does

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his sheep? The answer is yes. "My brothers, not many of you should become teachers, for you may be certain that we who teach shall ourselves be judged with greater strictness" (James 3:1 *New English Bible*).

I confess I do not know all the absolutes of that standard, or whether it is the same for all men. I suspect not. I suspect God judges each man, each woman, differently. I also suspect his standard of justice, his standard of mercy, is unlike anything we comprehend in our feeble understanding of the word.

At the same time, a man does not have to become a shepherd. He chooses to do so. And in choosing he closes the door, forever, on the right to have his own way—even in marriage. By entering the ministry he disqualifies himself to be judged as a sheep.

~~The sheep do what the shepherd does. If the shepherd smokes, he will have a church full of smokers. If a shepherd is divorced, by subtle implication he has suggested it is all right for the sheep to follow suit. And if the shepherd remarries, then the sheep, seeing that he can leave his wife and come through, are made to feel they can do it also. That is why the Scriptures say "If a man does not know how to control his own family, how can he look after a congregation of God's people?" (1 Timothy 3:5 NEB). It is a valid question, one which every responsible shepherd needs to answer—divorced or not.~~

~~**G**od requires more of his shepherds—because they have been given more. How often have I cried out, "Why can't I be judged as other men?" Invariably the answer comes. "Because you are not as other men."~~

~~Fifth, the sadness of a divorced shepherd is equaled only by the sadness of the sheep's reaction. We don't like it when our prophets raise their skirts and reveal feet of clay. Far better for us to see only their smiling faces in the pulpit, listen to their tapes and ignore their personal lives. But sheep have a responsibility to their shepherds also. They cannot ignore their frailties. Nor can they condemn the shepherds for falling. The call of God is for the sheep to support their~~

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shepherds in mighty intercessory prayer, to speak the truth to them in love, to lick their wounds when they return from the fray and to leave the judgment of their sin to God.

The question is not divorce. It is not even divorce and remarriage. The question is repentance. Has the shepherd repented? Or is he arrogant and stubborn, declaring his rightness in the situation? Repentance clears the deck for forgiveness and restoration. Arrogance disqualifies a man, whether he is divorced or not.

Sixth, every Christian who sees a shepherd fall needs to remind himself, "There but for the grace of God, go I." It is easy to forget how things were, or to overlook how they might have been in your own life except for the mercy of God. But because shepherds are on the point, God often allows them to stumble and fall. In the process new men are raised up; and old ones stagger, much wiser and more compassionate.

I remember sitting in the kitchen of one of America's most famous television ministers, listening in shocked silence as he treated his wife in an almost subhuman way. Later that night he appeared on television talking about his happy home. Happy for him, I thought. Hell for her. But because they stuck it out, in all their unhappiness, they have now emerged in splendid unity.

The biblical command to men is not, "Do not divorce your wife." Rather it is, "Husbands, love your wives." The husband, or wife, who chooses to divorce because the mate has committed fornication has probably been looking for some legalistic reason out of marriage for some time. Fornication is never a reason for divorce—it is merely an excuse. When a man and woman become "one in Christ" then nothing can separate them.

Granted, there are times when divorce is the only way out. But if both persons are determined to lay down their lives for each other, then Christ is always victor.

Finally, in searching for guidelines in relating to a divorced shepherd, we need to apply the principles of Matthew 18 before reaching a conclusion.

Unfortunately, there is something in most of us that enjoys a juicy story

about some well-known person. Yet we seldom enjoy hearing gossip about a member of our family. Love makes the difference.

Are we not commanded to love our wounded shepherds?

A number of months ago I entered into covenant with a group of Christian leaders. We promised not to talk about each other until we had first talked to the accused party. This has been difficult, especially when word comes that some fellow minister has slipped from the high road, engaged in deception or is having trouble at home. But the principle is sound and I have endeavored to stick to it.

Then, last year, I received a word that a man whom I deeply loved and respected had left his wife and moved into an apartment. His church was falling apart. His sheep scattering. I phoned. Was it so? Yes! And I caught the brokenness of his heart. He needed not only my counsel; he needed my love.

Until my call I had been flooded with

opinions. I had wanted to cry out: "Look what you are doing to the Kingdom." But as we talked, I softened.

He had done wrong. He should have stayed, and died if necessary. But I would leave that in God's hands. And as to the Kingdom? Well, it has weathered bigger things than this. It survived the adultery and murder contract of King David. It continued after John Wesley's wife stood in her husband's meetings and shouted, "Don't believe my husband. He is a hypocrite, liar and fraud." *When P. E. Campbell* The Kingdom withstood the reproach when the pastor of one of the nation's largest Baptist churches was accused of murdering the husband of his mistress. The Kingdom needs no defense. But Kingdom people need our prayers.

Thus I have concluded it is not my job to condemn. I shall leave that to the legalists and others too insecure to love. It is my task to bind the wounds of the fallen, to give sight to blind eyes, to open the prison doors of self-condemnation and, through prayer, pluck back my brothers and sisters

from the snare of the enemy, as brands plucked from the burning.

True, a man's effectiveness is badly damaged when his failures explode into public view. It is hard to believe a man who says Christ can solve all your problems, and then confesses with his life that his problem is too big for Jesus. It is hard to follow a man who says "take up the cross," but cannot bear his own. But who among us is qualified to cast the first stone? A man's ministry, like a man's servant, is the Master's business. And who am I to judge? Does God remove his anointing when a man of God sins, or fails in marriage? Is it not possible that in the prison cells of condemnation and failure there stand once-shorn Samsons, their hair growing, praying that God will give them just one more chance to stand and glorify his name? God forbid that I, by anything I say, stand in the way of God's restoration.

If a man still has the call of a shepherd, the sheep will hear his voice, and follow. Even if he walks with a limp.

Kingdom must not be.