

Clarity and Compassion: God's Word, Same Sex Marriage, and People You Love, 6
The Divorce Argument: Aren't Traditionalists Being Hypocritical?

Sunday Evening Bible Study
October 18, 2015

The "Divorce Argument" Stated

1. Summary: Since Christians have made exceptions to the "permanence" feature of Jesus' definition of marriage, we should also be able to make exceptions to the "heterosexual" feature of Jesus' definition of marriage.
2. "But we can't have it both ways. We can't apply a strict 'biblical marriage' rule to gay people and not apply it to those who are divorced and remarried." (Ken Wilson, *A Letter to My Congregation*, 140)
3. "One man and one woman, united in marriage for life, mutually exclusive and 'faithful' sexually, and joined because of their love for each other, is a relatively modern notion of marriage...[T]here are plenty of reasons for marriages to ...end in divorce...Opponents of gay marriage who claim they are worried about undermining the institution of marriage might instead spend their time and money equipping couples with communication skills..." (Gene Robinson, *God Believes in Love*, 113, 131)
4. "Opponents of gay marriage say they are defending the institution of marriage, but if that were really true why aren't they spending at least as much time and vigor attacking divorce?" (Austin Cline, *atheism.about.com*).
5. "Some officials think marriages between two women or two men don't deserve respect and dignity they reserve for their own heterosexual unions...even when those unions are crumbling. Of course, those attitudes usually come with a healthy dose of Holier Than Thou, and a citation or two from the 'good book.' The governor of Alabama, Robert Bentley, wooed voters in his state by saying the marriage, according to the Bible, consists of a union between one man and one woman..." ("Anti-Marriage Equality Alabama Gov. on His Own Divorce: 'It's Private,'" *Edge Media Network*).
6. "The Kentucky county clerk who has refused to issue same-sex marriage licenses for religious reasons despite a Supreme Court ruling has been divorced three times..." (Adriane de Vogue, *CNN*)
7. "She (Kim Davis) is a hypocrite. This is a woman who's been divorced three times and married four times...Jesus Christ himself in Scripture condemns divorce, calls it adultery and forbids it. Jesus Christ in Scripture says not one word about same-sex marriage." (Dan Savage in *MSNBC* interview).

Divorce in the Bible-Belt

1. Top ten states with highest divorce rate: Alaska, Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Nevada, Maine, Georgia, Tennessee, and Mississippi.
2. Top ten states with lowest divorce rate: New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, New York, Massachusetts, District of Columbia, Wisconsin, Connecticut, Maryland, and California.
3. An observation on these stats: If you don't get married, you can't get divorced. Low divorce rates mirror low marriage rates and high cohabitation rates.
4. While we're at it—Top Ten Most Obese States: Arkansas, West Virginia, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Oklahoma, Indiana, Ohio, North Dakota, South Carolina.

Factors to Consider:

1. The Myth: The divorce rate is higher among Christians than in the nation as a whole.
2. The Reality: The divorce rate among *serious* Christians is lower than the national average.
 - 2.1. The divorce rate among practicing (not just professing) Christians is much lower than the national average. Professing Christians who rarely attend church: 60% have been divorced; Practicing Christians who regularly attend church: 38% have been divorced (Bradley Wright, University of Connecticut).

- 2.2. Active conservative protestants who regularly attend church are 35% less likely to divorce compared to those with no church affiliation.
- 2.3. Nominally attending conservative protestants are 20% less likely to divorce compared to those with no church affiliation (W. Bradford Wilcox, Sociologist, U. of Virginia)
- 2.4. “Whether young or old, male or female, low-income or not, those who said that they were more religious reported higher average levels of commitment to their partners, higher levels of marital satisfaction, less thinking and talking about divorce and lower levels of negative interaction. These patterns held true when controlling for such important variables as income, education, and age at first marriage.” (Scott Stanley, U. of Denver).
- 2.5. “What appears intuitive is true. Couples who regularly practice any combination of serious religious behaviors and attitudes—attend church nearly every week, read their bibles and spiritual materials regularly; pray privately and together; generally take their faith seriously, living not as *perfect* disciples, but *serious* disciples—enjoy significantly lower divorce rates than mere church members, the general public, and unbelievers.” (Glen Stanton, *The Gospel Coalition*)

The Biblical Exceptions to Permanence:

1. Adultery: Mt. 19:9.
2. Abandonment: 1 Cor. 7:13–15.
3. “Every divorce is the result of sin, but not every divorce is sinful.” Kevin DeYoung

The Historic Protestant Position on Divorce and Remarriage

I. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman: neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband at the same time... **V.** Adultery or fornication, committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract. In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce, and after the divorce to marry another, as if the offending party were dead. **VI.** Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments, unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage; yet nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage; wherein a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it, not left to their own wills and discretion in their own case. (*Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) Ch. 24:1,5,6).

The Fallacies in the “Divorce Argument”

1. The “Ad Hominem” fallacy rejects a claim or argument based on an irrelevant fact about the person presenting the claim or argument. “You’re definition of marriage is wrong because you do not practice what you preach.”
2. The “Two-Wrongs Make A Right” fallacy justifies an action by asserting another person would do or is doing the same kind of thing; a wrongful action is a morally appropriate way to correct or cancel a previous wrongful action. “If you can do this (divorce), I can do that (gay marriage).”

The Credibility Factor (Matthew 7:1–5)

We will be able to demonstrate greater compassion and credibility when the church and individual believers honestly and humbly concede our own inconsistencies and tendency to ignore commands in the Bible we don’t want to deal with. In other words, we should confess our hypocrisy and repent.