



First United Methodist Church

Points to Ponder

Methodists and Divorce

Source: <https://bibledebates.wordpress.com/2010/03/27/methodist-changes-on-divorce/>

A significant case for context when interpreting the Bible can be made when using the example of the UMC position on divorce and remarriage. **In this same way, context is critical when interpreting the Bible with regard to LGBTQ issues.**

What the Bible Says About Divorce.

- In Matthew, Jesus states, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” (19:8-9); and “It has been said, “Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.” But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” (5:31-32)
- In Luke 16:18, Jesus states, “Anyone who divorces his wife and married another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”
- 1 Corinthians says, “But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.” (7:11-13); and “A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.” (7:39)

What the Methodists Say about Divorce.

Over a period of less than 90 years, the Methodists (*and most other denominations*) eventually determined that, while the Bible appears “clear” on this issue, context indeed matters.

- **Methodist Creed Book, 1896:** No divorce, except for adultery, shall be regarded by the Church as lawful; and no Minister shall solemnize marriage in any case where there is a divorced wife or husband living; but this rule shall not be applied to the innocent party to a divorce for the cause of adultery, nor to divorced parties seeking to be reunited in marriage.
- **Methodist Creed Book, 1914:** The Ministers of our Church shall be prohibited from solemnizing the rites of matrimony between divorced persons, except in the case of innocent parties who have been divorced for the one scriptural cause.
- **Methodist Creed Book, 1940:** No Minister shall solemnize the marriage of a divorced person whose wife or husband is living and unmarried; but this rule shall not apply (1) to the innocent person when it is clearly established by competent testimony that the true cause for divorce was adultery or other vicious conditions which through mental or physical cruelty or physical peril invalidated the marriage vow, nor (2) to the divorced persons seeking to be reunited in marriage.
- **Methodist Creed Book, 1960:** In view of the seriousness with which the Scriptures and the Church regard divorce, a minister may solemnize the marriage of a divorced person only when he has satisfied himself by careful counseling that (a) the divorced person is sufficiently aware of the factors leading to the failure of the previous marriage, (b) the divorced person is sincerely preparing to make the proposed marriage truly Christian, and (c) sufficient time has elapsed for adequate preparation and counseling.
- **Methodist Creed Book, 1984:** Where marriage partners, even after thoughtful consideration and counsel, are estranged beyond reconciliation, we recognize divorce as regrettable but recognize the right of divorced persons to remarry. We express our deep concern for the care and nurture of the children of divorced and/or remarried persons. We encourage that either or both of the divorced parents be considered for custody of the minor children of the marriage. We encourage an active, accepting, and enabling commitment of the church and our society to minister to the members of divorced families.

If Christians can conclude that even a practice called out by Jesus himself in multiple passages must be considered in light of the times, aren't we bound to apply similar thoughtful analysis to other, much less clear situations?

- Steven Di Pilla

03.2018