

IT IS NOT LAWFUL FOR THEE TO HAVE HER

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The utterance of these words by John the Baptist brought down the wrath of royalty upon him. Herod the tetrarch was in an unscriptural marriage with Herodias, his brother Philip's former wife. Herod was fearful of the multitude, so he could not put John the Baptist to death. However, when Herodias' daughter danced before Herod on his birthday, he was so moved that he cast better judgment aside and offered her anything she wanted. Imagine the effort the girl put into that lascivious spectacle after her own mother urged the performance anticipating the release of all restraint from the gratified ruler. And, what reward did the raunchy romp return? John the Baptist's head in a charger (Matt. 14:1-13).

Why could not John just simply keep quiet about the personal, private lives of the aristocracy who did not seem likely to obey God's will anyway? Why could he not just keep quiet like so many elderships in the churches of Christ today who reason that the personal, private lives of the members under their charge are no concern of theirs? Why could he not just keep quiet about the subjects of marriage, divorce, and remarriage like the majority of preachers whose wrists are shackled in the golden handcuffs of the worldly members who pay their salaries? It seems a most unusual concern John the Baptist had for Herod and Herodias. Why bother? Why pry? Why risk his life to make that politically incorrect point?

The answer is discovered in exploring the purpose for John the Baptist's ministry. The prophecy his father, Zacharias, gave provides the explanation: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he swore to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness

and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:68-79).

The prophecy of Isaiah concerning John the Baptist also made it plain: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isa. 40:3-8).

The work of John the Baptist was to prepare a frail, dying human race to receive salvation from sin in Christ. If like those mentioned earlier, he did not care that someone’s soul was in jeopardy he might as well never have been born. Today, people, otherwise good people, play favorites and customize Christianity to meet their felt needs. John the Baptist knew differently. The principle of rightly marrying was “to die for.”

The late Thomas B. Warren truthfully taught that there are three categories of people who have a scriptural right to marry: 1) Those physically and mentally mature of the opposite sex who have never married (Matt. 19:4-6, 10-12; Heb. 13:4). 2) Those whose spouse is deceased may remarry “only in the Lord” (Rom. 7:1-3; I Cor. 7:39). 3) The innocent party who has put away a fornicating spouse (Matt. 19:7-9). The subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage is difficult and complicated, not because of what the biblical text teaches but because of personal and emotional feelings on the subject. Make no mistake, many purposely confuse the subject to shroud violations known to exist among themselves, family members, and friends. All such efforts fall into the category of “handling the word of God deceitfully” (II Cor. 4:2).

The text key to deliberation on this point is Matthew 19:3-12. May careful, prayerful consideration be given to it. “The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain

shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."