

# COVENANT RENEWAL

Genesis 1:26-28

Matthew 28:18-20

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## FOOLS RUSH IN WITHOUT COUNSEL

Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established (Proverbs 15:22).

There's an old saying, "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." I'm changing that slogan a bit, as you can tell. I'm calling it, "**Fools Rush in without Counsel**," because it captures the essence of the verse: "Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established" (Proverbs 15:22). The whole Book of Proverbs is designed to prevent a man from becoming a "fool," meaning the kind of **moral** foolishness that results in a **covenant-breaking** lifestyle.

In this newsletter, however, I want to apply **covenantally** this principle in Proverbs to **remarriage**. In a sense, all of the principles on remarriage are designed to help you understand not only if a person can remarry after a legitimate divorce, but to enable you to see the key problems associated with remarriage. One of those is the tendency of divorced people to remarry too quickly.

As I consider many of the divorce situations I've encountered in my counseling ministry, they have all had their unique differences, but there is one common denominator: **they often failed to get counsel before they remarried**. That's right, they may have gone to a counselor during the trials and struggles of their first marriage. But when it came to the second one, it was as though they hadn't learned a thing. They are like most people who get into serious trouble. They rushed in without seeking the insights and advice of Biblical counselors: pastors, teachers, Christian friends and counselors.

If they had **known** nothing about any of the other principles of divorce and remarriage (See my book,

you can order it through I. C.E.), and if they had only known the principle I'm about to present, they probably could have been delivered from repeated heartache. They would have found a sort of **safety-net** to catch all of their foolish tendencies, because one or more of these many counselors would have said, "Wait a minute, are you sure you have a **Biblical** reason for divorce? Are you sure you really want a divorce? Are you sure you really want to marry this person? Aren't you moving a little too fast? Aren't you unequally yoking yourself? Hadn't you better consider the status of your children in this new marriage?" Perhaps they would have been stopped by these questions, and at least, they would have been forced to think through some of the problems that soon confronted them.

Good counsel makes up for a lot of ignorance. It is necessary for everyone because no one has perfect and comprehensive knowledge. It therefore provides a whole field of insight that no one parson would or could possibly accumulate. Let me give you a positive example where a man didn't know much, but he did know enough to go to

his pastor for counsel before he married a second time.

### One Who Did It Right!

John was a very prosperous corporate executive, who had been married for ten years to Lois. Both were deeply committed Christians, and they had a good family consisting of three children. Both had struggled at times like most people, but they had reared reasonably good children and they were quite happy. Unexpectedly, however, Lois died of cancer within an eighteen month period.

John was devastated by her death, as you might imagine. He was so happy, and suddenly, it was all taken away from him. He didn't know what to do with his feelings. At times he was extremely sad, and most of the other time he was angry at God. He knew he shouldn't be, because cancer was a result of man's sin in the world, and if anything, God was restoring the world through His redemption. But try as he did, he kept getting more and more bitter, as the first three months after Lois's death ticked by.

John had to go to the national convention for his company, which was being held that year in Hawaii. He thought it might provide a little relief, but on the other hand, even the thought of going to the scenic Hawaii did not appeal all that much to him. He didn't want to be around other people having fun, but in this case, he didn't have any choice. He had to go because he was one of the top officials of the company.

The first night that he was there, he could not sleep. He decided to try to tire himself out by swimming a few laps at the hotel pool. After he finished he sat by the pool for a moment and ordered a snack through room service. Just as he was about to leave, he noticed a very attractive woman across the pool from him who was frantically looking for something on the ground. Being a fairly helpful person, he went over and inquired if he could help.

She kept looking around through the flower bed behind the pool, as she explained that she had lost the key to her room a little earlier. She had been swimming, and she remembered putting her key in the pocket of her beach top. But she also remembered throwing the garment over the back of a chair next to the flower bed where they were now looking.

After John found out that her name was Dorothy, he suggested that maybe someone had turned the key in at the main desk. He said that he was more than willing to walk with her down to the main lobby since it was getting kind of late. After she had agreed, John found himself walking and talking with her about why she was in Hawaii. He learned that she was vacationing from her executive secretary's position in a town fairly close to his in the Midwest. He also discovered that she was not married and that she never had been.

From that little walk to the lobby, they progressed rapidly in their relationship. They had breakfast the next morning, and they spent every spare moment with each other. They fell in love in romantic Hawaii, and they planned to get married as soon as John could talk to his pastor.

John knew enough as a Christian to seek counsel from his pastor. He had gotten to know this man over the years, and the Reverend had been a lot of help throughout Lois's illness. So, when he got back from his trip, he went to see the pastor, and he told him the whole story.

To his surprise, the pastor did not share John's enthusiasm. He was not even impressed when John told him that her name was Dorothy and that the name means, "Gift of God," implying that God had given him this woman as a replacement for Lois. He just started pointing out all of the negatives. He pointed out that John had only known this woman for a week. Furthermore, he was quite troubled about her story. He flat out told John that he didn't know anything about the woman. And then he almost insulted John when he said, "How do you know this woman isn't lying to you about her past? How do you know she hasn't been married before?"

John was really upset, but he concealed it out of respect for his pastor. He left quietly, bothered about the whole meeting. He walked and walked and walked. He went home and found himself full of energetic anxiety. He could not get the pastor's conversation out of his mind. Then he was struck with the thought that he would do a little checking on Dorothy to prove that she was telling the truth.

Well, after John hired a detective to do some work, he was surprised. He learned that Dorothy had been married five times, the last two times to fairly wealthy business executives, and her last husband had died with some serious questions around his death. John had been forced to find out information that may have literally saved his life. He had been driven to decide not to marry this woman all because a good Biblical counselor had smelled a problem, and provoked him into doing the right thing: "Without counsel plans go awry, but in the **multitude** of counselors they are established" (Proverbs 15:22).

John had sought to improve his judgment by allowing a counselor to pass judgment on his feelings and decisions. He had spared his life a great deal of headache and heartache through this invaluable principle. Let us understand this principle and then consider how to apply it, so that you will know properly how to seek this confirmation.

### The Principle of Judgment

Judgment is a concept found in the fourth part of the covenant: sanctions (Deuteronomy 27-30). Moses, the great leader of Israel was about to die, and so he called all of **Israel** to allow itself to be judged through a ratification process. They made new promises before the Lord, and allowed Him to judge them **up front in their commitment**. It is best to see a counselor and let him judge a person's judgment before the mistakes are made.

Counseling is a judgment process spelled out in more detail in the verse at the beginning of the chapter. It says, "Without counsel plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are **established**" (Proverbs 15:22). The idea is that life falls into judgment when there are no counselors to pass judgment beforehand. But, when there **is** counsel, there is judgment unto life, resurrection. The Hebrew word for "established" means "to raise up," and it is translated **confirm** in other contexts (Ruth 4:7; Esther 9:29, 31). The Hebrew is interesting because the word implies resurrection, which you can see in the basic idea of "to raise up." So, the verse in Proverbs means that a man's plans go the way of death, but with counselors, they go the way of life, or **resurrection, which ties** into the role

that Moses played with Israel. He was their counselor par excellence. He raised them up, or established them through his judgment. He directed them to a new life, or we could say, he lead them to a second chance.

Biblical counsel should provide the same. It should attempt to keep people from death, and it should seek to resurrect them from their past. It should establish and **confirm** them through the Word of God. But the problem is that most people don't know how to use a counselor. The problem is that they don't know what good counseling is. The problem is that they don't even know how to do what John did. So, let's apply the principle of counsel and apply several counseling situations from the **Bible** to explain what a person should be looking for in the confirmation of a potential second marriage.

### 1. Seasoned Counsel

Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who stood before his father Solomon while he still lived, and he said, "How do you advise me to answer these people?" And they spoke to him saying, "if you will be a servant to these people today, and serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever." But he rejected the counsel which the elders gave him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him. And he said to them, "What counsel do you give? How should we answer this people who have spoken to me, saying, 'Lighten the yoke which your father put on us?'" Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him, saying, "Thus you should speak to this people who have spoken to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make it lighter on us' – thus you shall say to them: 'My little finger shall be thicker than my father's waist! And now, whereas my father laid a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourgings!'" (1 Kings 12:6-11).

Rehoboam was the son of the great king, Solomon. He had been asked by the people to lighten up on the demands that had been placed by his father. So, he went to the elders to seek counsel, which was a good thing. But they didn't tell him what he wanted to hear. They were older and wiser, and they told him to think about serving the people, to endear them to him so that they wouldn't mind the demands placed on them. Rehoboam did not like their counsel, so he did what so many people do: he found counselors who would tell him what he wanted to hear! In this case, he chose young counselors who would give him a quick and easy solution. They told him to use force instead of service to gain the compliance of the people.

Anyone seeking counsel should go to an **older, and/or wiser** counselor who has gained lots of experience dealing with his particular problem. He does not have to go to a counselor older than he is, but he should go to someone who has matured in his abilities and insights. An older counselor will have firmer and wiser counsel. He will not tell a person what he wants to hear. He will tell him what needs to be done, and he will usually tell him things to do that will take more time. An older person usually has a more stretched-out view of time, enabling him to see things more in the long term.

All of this is especially important when considering remarriage. A person needs objective guidance. He needs someone who is not afraid to tell him what he doesn't want to hear. And he needs someone with a different view of time, someone who can slow him down. He needs seasoned counseling.

### 2. Structured Counsel

And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to

judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening. So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you lone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?" And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws." So Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you" (Exodus 18:13-22).

The father-in-law of Moses, Jethro, noticed that Moses' leadership responsibilities were too large for one man to handle. He proposed a solution to divide the nation into the sociological structure of a pyramid, with Moses at the top and officers over increasingly smaller groups toward the bottom. This way, he could take some of the load off of Moses. What he really did was to structure Moses' administration of leadership by structuring Israel. He placed **Moses under a hierarchy, as much** as he did over one, by restricting Moses' involvement in matters until they were too difficult for someone else to handle.

Jethro did what any good counselor should do. He saw the big picture of what was happening to Moses. He observed that Moses had entered a relationship that was about to consume him. And so, he provided a solution to the problem by dealing with it in terms of a hierarchy.

A good counselor should do the same for the person considering remarriage. He should look at the total lives of the individuals. He should evaluate how the new marriage is going to affect their lives. But most importantly, he should relate their problems to a hierarchy. What do I mean? According to the system laid out by Jethro, the court system of Israel was **layered**, moving from the bottom up. Everyone had what has come to be called in the West, **due process**; he had somewhere to which he could appeal.

A good counselor should navigate people toward such a structure. If they are not members of a church, they should be encouraged to become members of a good Bible-believing congregation, because the officers in the church are the proper appeals court for the family in non-criminal matters. If they are not members of a church that has its own appeals system, they should be warned. Remember, according to **Jethro's** counsel, everyone was accountable to someone, and so the elders of the church are to be accountable to other elders and so forth. In other words, a good counselor moves people into a position where they can obtain a **multitude** of counselors, which is exactly what an appeals-system-church offers.

### 3. Lawful Counsel

Then the days of David drew near that he should die, and he charged Solomon his son, saying: "I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man. And keep the charge of the Lord your God:

to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn (1 Kings 2:1-3 )."

David, the great giant-killing king, was about to die when he called his son to offer some final counsel, much the same as Moses had done with Israel, even using the same summary purpose of his counsel: "That you may prosper in all that you do" (Deuteronomy 29:9; 1 Kings 2:3). And not only did David give the identical summary purpose, he also offered the same basic counsel as Moses who had attached to the front of "that you may prosper," "Keep the words of this covenant, and do them" (Deuteronomy 29:9a). So David echoes the same ethical thrust in his counsel by telling Solomon to prove himself a man by keeping God's law. He did what a true Biblical counselor was supposed to do. He moved Solomon toward God's law.

Two people considering marriage for a second time should go to a counselor to have him point out any of God's laws that might affect their situation, which presumes that he should be a Biblical counselor who knows the Old and New Testament. They should be leery of a counselor who knows more psychology than the Bible, and that's not to say that certain aspects of research done in the field of psychology can't help a Biblical counselor; but he should know more about the Word of God and how it applies to the practical problems that man faces.

They should go with the counsel of Jethro in mind, who said to Moses, "You shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and **work** they must do" (Exodus 18:20). And with these words in mind, they should expect their counselor to do no less. He should be able to tell them if they had Biblical grounds for divorce, and if they have Biblical grounds for remarriage. He should know the principles of this book, because I have tried to approach the question of divorce and remarriage with the Old and New Testament in mind. And he should warn them of **any** part of God's law that the couple might be violating or coming near to violating if they should marry.

### 4. Protective Counsel

Then a wise woman cried out from the city, "Hear, Hear! Please say to Joab, 'Come nearby, that I may speak with you.'" When he had come near to her, the woman said, "Are you Joab?" He answered, "I am." Then she said to him, "Hear the words of your maid-servant." And he answered, "I am listening." Then she spoke, saying, "They used to talk in former times, saying, 'They shall surely ask counsel at Abel,' and so they would end disputes. I am among the peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city and a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the Lord?" And Joab answered and said, "Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy! That is not so. But a man from the mountains of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has raised his hand against the king, against David. Deliver him only, and I will **depart** from the city." And the woman said to Joab, "Watch, his head will be thrown to you over the wall." Then the woman in her wisdom went to all the people. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and threw it out to Joab. Then he blew a trumpet, and they withdrew from the city, every man to his tent. So Joab returned to the king at Jerusalem (2 Samuel 20:16-22).

In ancient Israel, a rebel named Sheba arose who wanted to overthrow David. He was found out and pursued by David's body guard, Joab. Because Joab was a **power-**

ful man, Sheba fled for his life to a place named Abel. He thought that he could find safety there because it was known for being a city for settling disputes (2 Samuel 20:18). Maybe he thought that his conflict with David and Joab could be settled there. But when he took asylum in the city, he brought the whole town into jeopardy, because Joab was in hot pursuit.

While in route, a wise counselor of Abel, whose name we are not told, knew what would happen if Joab arrived and found out that Abel had been hiding out a rebel. So she devised a plan. She sent a message to Joab to find out what she could do to avert the annihilation of her home and city. She was told that Sheba had to be given to him. Upon learning this information, she then counseled the leaders of the city to execute Sheba on behalf of the king to demonstrate their loyalty and to remove any possibility of retaliation on the part of Joab. She was successful and the city of counsel was saved.

This woman demonstrates perhaps the greatest skill of a counselor: the ability to lead people away from the judgment of God, or the ability to protect from God's wrath. A counselor should believe in the reality of the judgment of God first and foremost. If he doesn't believe, then he will give counsel with no thought of the consequences for either his bad counsel, or the wrong actions of the people he is counseling; everybody loses, better, everybody gets judged. If he doesn't believe, then he will not try to lead people to Christ, who removed the judgment of God from man. Instead, he should beware of the consequences, spiritual and otherwise, of not obeying God's Word.

For two people considering a second marriage, protection is very important. The first failed marriage has already had enough bad effect, and they probably feel as though there has been enough judgment on them. They need to be guided away from, not into, more judgment, so they need to be told frankly whether or not they should remarry, or whether or not they should be marrying each other. They need to be made aware of the negative consequences if they marry unlawfully, and I should add, they need to realize the consequences of obeying as well. They need to be shown how to please, and not anger God with their new marriage!

### 5. Lasting Counsel

When they heard this, they were furious and took

counsel to kill them. Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it – lest you even be found to fight against God (Acts 5:33-39).

Gamaliel's counsel is perhaps the most famous counsel ever given to the Jews. He gave it in the context of John's and Peter's being imprisoned for preaching in Jerusalem, after which they were brought to a trial where he gave this counsel. He very simply reasoned that a man named Theudas had claimed to be the Messiah, and his movement had never amounted to anything. He concluded that it was not of God. But, he was really trying to say that something which is of God lasts, to his own people's utter condemnation after two thousand years of expanding Christianity.

The principle of counseling for those entering a second marriage is that a marriage founded in the Lord **"cannot be overcome"** (Acts 5:39), to use Gamaliel's words. It will not be temporary, but it will last as long as two people are physically alive. For this reason, it should not be approached hurriedly or carelessly. It is like building a house, which if built haphazardly will not be a permanent structure. So, any counsel given to them should be to this end. Two people should not enter the marriage thinking "temporary," or that they can get out of the marriage if this one doesn't work, rather they should think **permanent!** And they should be counseled by being told the principles of marriage that maintain it over the long haul.