

Contents

- 1 Divorce and Remarriage Today 7

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

- 2 Marriage 51
3 Singleness 84
4 Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament 129
5 Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of Jesus 180
6 Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of Jesus
and of St Paul 237
7 Singleness After Marriage 260
8 Biblical Conclusions 288

PASTORAL PRACTICE

- 9 Educating 313
10 Caring 359
11 Reconciling 421
12 Bearing Witness 464

- Acknowledgements* 495
Abbreviations 496
Bibliography 497
Index of Biblical References 509
Index of Authors 519
Index of Ancient Literature 522
Index of Subjects 523
Appendix 529

Divorce and Remarriage Today

NORA: There's another problem needs solving first. I must take steps to educate myself. You are not the man to help me there. That's something I must do on my own. That's why I'm leaving you.

HELMER (jumps up): What did you say?

NORA: If I'm to reach any understanding of myself and the things around me, I must learn to stand alone. That's why I can't stay here with you any longer.

HELMER: Nora! Nora!

NORA: I'm leaving here at once. I dare say Kristine will put me up for tonight ...

HELMER: You are out of your mind! I won't let you! I forbid you!

NORA: It's no use forbidding me anything now. I'm taking with me my own personal belongings. I don't want anything of yours, either now or later.

HELMER: This is madness!

NORA: Tomorrow I'm going home – to what used to be my home, I mean. It will be easier for me to find something to do there.

HELMER: Oh, you blind, inexperienced ...

NORA: I must set about *getting* experience, Torvald.

HELMER: And leave your home, your husband and your children? Don't you care what people will say?

NORA: That's no concern of mine. All I know is that this is necessary for *me*.

HELMER: This is outrageous! You are betraying your most sacred duty.

NORA: And what do you consider to be my most sacred duty?

HELMER: Does it take me to tell you that? Isn't it your duty to your husband and your children?

NORA: I have another duty equally sacred.

HELMER: You have not. What duty might *that* be?

NORA: My duty to myself.

HELMER: First and foremost, you are a wife and mother.

NORA: That I don't believe any more. I believe that first and foremost I am an individual, just as much as you are – or at least I'm going to try to be. I know most people agree with you, Torvald, and that's also what it says in books. But I'm not content any more with what most people say, or what it says in books. I have to think things out for myself, and get things clear.

* * *

HELMER: You are ill, Nora. You are delirious. I'm half-inclined to think that you are out of your mind.

NORA: Never have I felt so calm and collected as I do tonight.

HELMER: Calm and collected enough to leave your husband and children?

NORA: Yes.

HELMER: Then only one explanation is possible.

NORA: And that is?

HELMER: You don't love me any more.

NORA: Exactly.

HELMER: Nora! Can you say that!

NORA: I'm desperately sorry, Torvald. Because you have always been so kind to me. But I can't help it. I don't love you any more.

(Ibsen: *The Doll's House*)

These words which were certainly shocking, and designed to shock, in 1879 – only just over a century ago – will today be recognised by literally millions of people. Many husbands and wives have felt precisely this way themselves, even if they haven't been able to articulate it as clearly as Nora. Many have heard friends or family members express precisely these thoughts. Many pastors and Christian leaders have heard almost exactly these words as they have spoken with those whose marriages are breaking up. Nora speaks for an increasing number of people who have felt trapped in their marriages.

In the period 1901–10, the average number of divorces per year in England and Wales was 593¹. By the 1930s this had risen

almost ninefold to 5,096 per year. By the 1960s that figure in turn had increased almost eight times to 39,654, and the 1970s saw an increase of over threefold on the previous decade to an average of 121,991. By 1980 the figure had reached 148,301 and its highest point so far was reached in 1993: 165,018. Since then the number of divorces has fallen a little, in part due to fewer couples getting married: in 1988 there were 348,492 marriages; 1998: 267,303.

The divorce rate has also accelerated dramatically. The rate of divorce per thousand married couples was 2.0 in 1960; this had risen over sevenfold to 14.2 by 1993. 'The speed of change is most clearly seen when one considers the divorce behaviour of people married in the same year. For example, 10% of couples married in 1951 had divorced by their 25th wedding anniversary. However, amongst those marrying in 1961 10% had divorced by their 12th wedding anniversary, whilst among those marrying in 1971 and 1981 the analogous durations of marriage were 6 and 4.5 years' (Kiernan and Wicks p.13²). The 1991 figure is just over 2 years. Dates of divorces are for decrees absolute; petitions are normally filed six months to a year beforehand, and at least one partner will have determined that the marriage has irretrievably broken down before filing the petition. John Haskey, the principal Government Statistician of Divorce Statistics, worked out that at existing rates 41% of all marriages contracted in 1993-94 would ultimately end in divorce.

England has of course not been alone in seeing this rise in divorce. Within the 12 EEC countries, there were 125,300 divorces

¹ All figures in this chapter are for England and Wales (referred to as 'England' for convenience; Welsh readers, please forgive!) and are from the official figures of the Office for National Statistics, except where otherwise indicated. US statistics are from the Census Bureau. EEC statistics are from the Statistical Office of the European Communities. 'Divorces' includes annulments, but these are statistically insignificant, since there are over 300 divorces for every one annulment.

² References to other works are given by author and page number only. For commentaries, author alone is mentioned and the page number can be assumed to be *ad loc.* except where indicated. Further details of books cited can be found in the Bibliography.