

ISSUES THAT UNDERLIE MARRIAGE POLICIES

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1. Is marriage a Christian institution or a social/racial/human one?

Deciding that marriage is a racial institution means that a minister may conceive of himself as serving primarily an agent of the state rather than the church. In that case he feels freer to perform weddings for non-Christians or even for mixed couples. A minister may still want to consider whether a “minister’s” performing the wedding has the appearance of religious approval of it.

2. Is a Christian-plus-non-Christian marriage a matter of ethics (morality) or advice (pragmatics)?

If marriage is a racial institution, then mixed marriages between Christians and non-Christians—as well as between Christians of different races and denominations—are legitimate marriages as far a morality is concerned. You have to consider, however, the wisdom/ advisability of such an arrangement. It may work in some situations but there is so much risk from a practical standpoint that the general rule at least should be against it, as Paul says in various places in his writings.

3. Is performing weddings for a restricted number a matter of theology or logistics?

There is only so much time any person has to do his job. Ministry is already one of those callings that has no natural boundaries. There is no way to know when you are done because there is no end to the work; a person can know only whether he and his situation has all that it can hold. In larger congregations the number of weddings and funerals can eat up a lot of time in a minister’s schedule. For that reason alone—aside from any consideration of the advisability or morality of some marriage possibilities—ministers may want to establish some restrictive guidelines simply so they can cope with their load and keep themselves concentrated on more distinctive aspects of the ministry of the word. Minister who place limitations on weddings sometimes adopt policies like the following:

- (a) marrying only church members in this congregation
- (b) marrying only Christians to each other (which, of course, involves you in deciding how broad that category will be)
- (c) marrying only non-divorced persons
- (d) marrying only those who agree to a given program of counseling