

*Marriage, Divorce
and
Separation*



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Preface

MANY VIEWS ON THIS SUBJECT

In 1990 a book, *Divorce and Remarriage, Four Christian Views*, was published. It is surprising that four views so opposed are all “Christian Views,” but let that pass. The four views presented are:

1. No Divorce and No Remarriage;
2. Divorce, but No Remarriage;
3. Divorce and Remarriage for Adultery and Desertion; and
4. Divorce and Remarriage Under a Variety of Circumstances.

This present paper does not promote any of these four opinions because Scripture allows for divorce and remarriage only in the case where a spouse has committed fornication (Matt. 19:9). In 1931 F. C. Jennings (see Appendix 1) wrote a paper advocating position 3, departing from what brethren taught on this subject during the 1800s. Many have joined him in this defection.

PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

The purpose of this paper is to show that Scripture teaches, and our brethren gathered together to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in the 1800s taught, that:

1. There is only one scriptural ground for divorce (fornication); and that the one offended against may remarry.
2. When an unbeliever deserts a believer because of his Christianity, etc., and no fornication takes place on the part of the deserter, the marriage tie subsists and the Christian is not permitted to marry another.

Concerning what was written in the 1800s among those gathered together to Christ’s name, I have found only one exception to this teaching in Point 1: an article which stated that (contrary to the teaching of Matt. 19:9) the Christian may not remarry. No statement contrary to Point 2 has been discovered; no, not even by J. N. Darby, as I hope to make quite clear. True, some may vainly claim JND contradicted Point 2, but you must bear with me when I say that such have not apprehended his teaching on divorce and have overlooked some of his *express statements* which show that he held to Point 2 -- though certainly there may be other causes for such departure from the truth than merely a lack of apprehension. What seems contrary to this in his writings, I hope to show, is not contrary; but rather when understood, affirms Point 2. This matter is very serious because to violate Matt. 19:9 involves a *subsisting status* to such a marriage as shown in the words “commits adultery” -- present tense -- as in Mark and Luke also.

Moreover, it is very distressing to see the name of J. N. Darby besmirched by forcing his words to sanction a new view which was actually, consciously introduced by F. C. Jennings. This matter involves sanction of what in reality is characterized in Scripture as “commits adultery.” That it is not intended to sanction adultery is beside the point.

That those called TW brethren historically held to one basis for divorce is quite clear in the following quotation:

All through the history of “Brethren” it has been held that in the exceptional case referred to, by the Lord, twice in Matthew (5:32; 19:9), the innocent person might remarry (See Mr. Darby’s Letters and Synopsis).¹

Notice that this letter restricts the grounds for divorce and remarriage to one basis only, and refers the reader to JND’s writings as indicating this. And this is correct.

J. R. Gill correctly wrote:

In actual practice today a woman (for instance) if divorced by her husband on such grounds as are common in the world -- incompatibility of temperment, etc. -- must, scripturally, remain unmarried UNLESS the husband either before or after the divorce is guilty of fornication.²

Why has a change in view come about? Someone wrote this to me:

As to the “Divorce and remarriage question” I fully expect the false positions being taken are because of family relationships. How sad that dear saints of God will deny their Lord in favor of a relative. And I expect it will only get worse as we await our Lord’s coming to take us home.

It may be that the same unholiness is at work concerning the violation of 1 Cor. 5:12, concerning leaven:

. . . with such a one not even to eat.

In violation of this it has been said that one may defile himself for an excommunicated relative (yet even the word *defile* is not usually used any more). This matter is dealt with in “. . . With Such a One not Even to Eat.”³ It is *unholiness* in both cases; unholiness in teaching as well as in practice.

To the above quotation we may add the following from W. J. Hocking. A question and answer concerning 1 Cor. 7:15 appeared in *The Bible Monthly* in 1934.

1. Letter from Renton, WA, April 15, 1930, “To Saints Gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ Elsewhere, signed by B. Murr, C. J. Anderson, Edward Leighton, John R. Gill, G. M. Fournier, Alvin E. Peterson, Harold H. Muir, and Sidney R. Gill.

2. *Divorce and Remarriage*, p. 5.

3. Available from the publisher. See *Letters of J. N. Darby* 3:63.

A. F. (Illinois). In 1 Cor. 7:15 we read, “But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God has called us to peace.” Are we to understand that the one who is left is free to marry again, even though the one who is separated is still alive ?

No, we do not think the passage affords the believing partner in such a case licence to marry another. The licence or freedom is given to the believer to let the unbeliever go away at his or her own request. The believer is said to be free to forego his or her marriage claims upon the unbelieving partner, under the circumstances.

The translation of the verse by W. K., is, “But if the unbelieving separateth himself, let him be separated. The brother or the sister is not in bondage in such circumstances: but God hath called us in peace.” His comment on the passage is, “If the unbelieving party in the relationship were to sever himself from the other, the believer is released from bondage, be it the brother or the sister in the case.

Not that such an act on the unbeliever’s side gives to the believer thus abandoned licence to marry, but that the believer is thereby left the more free to serve the Lord by the other’s separation. Such a union after all is apt to involve strife, the natural man hating the life of the Spirit. Not that this would justify anything on the believer’s part to break the marriage tie: the believer is supposed to have broken it of himself or even herself; and ‘in peace hath God called us’ (or ‘you ’), not to seek separation.”

More recently, Adrian Roach wrote:

A man or woman (saved or unsaved) {who} puts away the marital partner for reasons other than fornication and then marries another has put themselves in an adulterous position. The meaning of “commiteth” in Matt. 19 is in the present tense. In the original Greek it is not just one act; it is the continuance in it. A person in this unscriptural position is barred from the Lord’s table; they have put themselves under the government of God (Nov. 21, 1979).⁴

These quotations are representative of the position on the subject maintained in this paper. Moreover, the notion that JND held that desertion not involving fornication is a ground for divorce and remarriage is absurd -- an effort to sanction a new teaching and practice of unholiness with his name.

THE MEANING OF FORNICATION

I add two extracts taken from *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. The first quotation indicates that homosexuality can fall under the classification “fornication” in Greek usage.

. . . (*porneuo*), practice prostitution or sexual immorality, commit fornication;

4. From, *Notes on Marriage and Divorce*, available from Present Truth Publishers.

. . . (*porne*), harlot, prostitute; . . . (*pornos*), an immoral person, a fornicator; . . . (*porneia*), unchastity, harlotry, prostitution, fornication.

CL *porneuo* from *pernemi* (to sell) (Hdt. onwards), means trans. to prostitute. It is usually in the pass. of the woman: to prostitute oneself, become a prostitute. But it is also used of the man, to whore, to fornicate. Derivations include (a) *Porne* (Aristot. onwards), a woman who is for sale, a prostitute, courtesan; (b) *pornos* (likewise Aristot. onwards), the fornicator who has sexual intercourse with prostitutes, but then also an immoral man, i.e. one who allows himself to be misused for immoral purposes for money, a male prostitute; and (c) *porneia* (Dem. onwards, rare in cl. GK.).

1. The word-group can describe various extra-marital sexual modes of behavior insofar as they deviated from accepted social and religious norms (e.g., homosexuality, promiscuity, paedophilia, and especially prostitution) (vol. 1, p. 497).

The second extract is from vol. 2, p. 587 and refers to the NT use of *koite*.

NT In the NT *koite* occurs on 4 occasions. In Lk. 11:7 it is used in the sense of bed as a place of rest . . . In Rom. 9:10 the word occurs in the expression *koiten echousa*, and is a euphemism for coitus, and by expansion, conception and pregnancy. In this sense it is similar to the use of *miskab* as a surrogate for coition, but no clear instance exists in Heb. where the word may connote the result of coition, i.e., conception. The theological point of the passage is that Rebekah conceived children “by one man, our forefather Isaac.” Yet before either of these male twins had done anything good or bad God in His divine sovereignty had decreed that “the elder shall serve the younger” (Rom. 9:12; cf. Gen. 25:23). The argument forms an important part of Paul’s case demonstrating to Jewish readers the consistency of divine sovereignty in the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God.

The word *koite* is used in the plural, in Rom. 13:13 in the sense of illicit sexual union. In this context the word is accompanied by such terms as reveling (*komos*), and licentiousness (*aselgeia*), all of which are also in the plural. Believers are warned to avoid them, together with quarreling (*eris*) and jealousy (*zelos*), “but to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires” (Rom. 13:14).

In Heb. 13:4 the word occurs in the sense of “marriage bed” as it does in the OT. In this context the writer affirms that the marriage relationship is an honorable one, and at the same time it is to be kept honorable.

T. McComiskey.

* * * * *

Scripture quotations are from the translation of J. N. Darby.

What is found in brackets { } has been added by myself.

Marriage

by A. P Cecil

{The following is taken from a paper, *Marriage*, by A. P. Cecil, pp. 7-16}.

In answer to the Pharisees who asked Him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? He answered, Have ye not read that He that made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said,

For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they two shall be one flesh.

The Lord goes back to the terms of God's original institution: He says, Therefore they are no longer two but one flesh; and concludes with the injunction;

What God therefore hath joined together, let no man put asunder.

The Pharisees then brought up Moses' law, and asked why He allowed wives to be put away, after giving them a writing of divorcement. He said to them,

Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, gave you this precept, but at the beginning it was not so. Whosoever, therefore, shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her which is put away, committeth adultery.

Only, therefore, for one cause was divorce sanctioned, and that for the sin of fornication. Marriage was also forbidden with a divorced woman (Matt. 5:32; 19:3-9), and polygamy set aside.

Now this gives great light as to how far we ought to follow human laws on the subject of marriage. **If they sanction sin, and divorce for anything less than fornication, the Christian and the Assembly are not to own such acts, as of God, though the divorce is legal.** ⁵ It was legal for a Jew to put away his wife for less causes than fornication, but the Lord's authority comes in, and pronounces such acts to be sin, and as causing the woman to commit fornication. However, a Christian is bound to submit himself to the powers that be, and whenever the laws of the land are not subversive of the authority of the Lord, they are to be obeyed. The magistrates are God's ministers to dispense justice (Rom. 13:1, etc.).

5. {Emphasis added. The whole paper may be found in *The Collected Writings of A. P. Cecil*, obtainable from Present Truth Publishers.}

As Adam's word gave the civil sanction to the original institution of marriage, so it is now. God owns the civil sanction of the laws of the land to His institution, though not to subvert it. The Assembly stands, I believe, as God's witness in the matter on His behalf, and represents Him as the One who really joins the man and woman together! Whatsoever therefore, as ruled by the Word of God, it binds on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever it shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Rome has perverted this power to exalt herself, and to act contrary to the Word of God, but the truth of God remains, and the Word of God must ever have a higher authority than the laws of men.

Now if this was all it would be an absolute sin to despise God's ordinances, and not to marry; and, indeed, wherever human regulations have come in, they have always been subversive of moral order, witness the disgraceful state of the convents and nunneries in the middle ages (which were often mere brothels for the priests who had taken the vows of celibacy). We cannot, my reader, despise God's institution of marriage without suffering or running into sin!

Notwithstanding this, however, Christianity has introduced a heavenly life, which, when communicated to the believer, lifts him above the actual necessity of marrying; only even here there needs a special gift of faith to lay hold of the power. It is the life of the heavenly Christ introduced into the believer by the Spirit of God. The believer, therefore, is not only a forgiven and justified man, through believing on Christ who died for his sins and rose for his justification, but, being accounted righteous, and having the life of the risen ascended Christ breathed into him, he has died to sin, and is alive to God in a new condition; he is not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be the Spirit of God dwells in him. He is therefore privileged to go forth in the power of this new life, to manifest nothing but Christ, holding the flesh that remains in him as dead by the power of Christ's death.

Now Christ went through this scene unmarried: He now is clearly above this scene of nature. So we, having Himself as our life, and that life communicated by the Holy Ghost, have power given us to walk like Him. Nevertheless, all have not this particular gift (1 Cor. 7:7).

This is why the apostle says, in 1 Cor. 7:1-10, that it is good for a man not to touch ⁶ a woman, nevertheless to avoid fornication, if a man cannot contain, let every man have his own wife! He says again, I would that all were even as myself; but every one hath his proper gift of God. The apostle's advice, then, to the unmarried, and to the widows, was, it is good for them if they abide unmarried, but if they cannot contain, it is better to marry than to burn with lust.

6. {The intent of this is touch in a sexual way.}

In regard to the married, the wife was not to depart from her husband; if she did, she was to remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband. In the case of marriage with heathens, before conversion, if the unbelieving wife was pleased to dwell with her husband, he was not to put her away; and if a woman had a husband who did not believe, and he was pleased to dwell with her, she was not to leave him. The unbelieving husband was sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife by the husband, else were the children unclean, but now are they holy. They are set apart for the privileges of Christianity, just like Hebrew children circumcised had the privileges of Judaism. But if the unbelieving husband or wife departed, let them depart. In such a case there was no bondage. Besides there was the question of the salvation of the unbelieving husband or wife, which was to be considered (1 Cor. 7:10-17).

Those that were married, likewise, would have trouble in the flesh, particularly in times of necessity or persecution. There was a danger, too, of being occupied with worldly things, and of pleasing the wife rather than the Lord (1 Cor. 7:26-28). The apostle gives full liberty; if the young unmarried woman remained unmarried, it was good, she did not sin. Later on in the Epistles (1 Tim. 5:14) he advises young widows to marry. In either case, man or woman, if they judged it a reproach to their virginity to remain unmarried, it was no sin, let them marry. But if a man stands steadfast in his heart, not having necessity, and has power over his own will, to keep his state of virginity, he does better. He therefore that marries does well. He that does not marry does better.

A wife was bound by the law to her husband as long as he lived. If her husband died, she was free to marry again, only in the Lord. Unequal yokes of all sorts, whether in marriage, business partnerships, or, above all, in matters of worship and God's house, were strictly forbidden (see 2 Cor. 6:14-16). The general thought then is, that the original order of creation is owned, as to marriage, now that Christianity is introduced; only put on the ground of redemption. Still, beyond and above this, a heavenly life has been brought into the world, and has risen out of death, and above all this scene of nature. This blessed heavenly life -- the life of God in Christ -- is communicated to the believer by the Holy Ghost, who is its power and energy. This is able to lift the believing man above the requirements of nature. The teaching of the apostle Paul (in 1 Cor. 7) is founded on this. Marriage is honorable to all, and the bed undefiled (Heb. 13:4). It is in no way to be despised; nevertheless, it is good if a man has power to live above the necessity.

In the case of marriage, the will of God is the supreme matter. Is the wife or husband given me by the Lord's will, or is it my own choice? In the case of the person sought being unconverted, the path is plain: marriage is only

sanctioned *in the Lord*. But the will of the Lord goes beyond this: is the Christian I marry the partner God would have me take, or is he or she the object of my own will or choice? The future path in happiness or misery of the married must greatly depend on this. May the Lord increasingly be glorified in his saints by His will being sought in these matters!

As to the actual character suitable to the married ones, submission is the great mark for the wife, love for the husband (see Eph. 5:22-25; Col. 3:18-19). No doubt wives are reciprocally to love their husbands, as we see in the injunction of Titus 2:4; but who loved first, Christ or the Church?

The honorable place that marriage has in the thoughts of God, is that in Eph. 5:22-23, it is put as an illustration of the union existing between Christ the Head of the Church and His Bride. Christ holds a double relationship towards His Church: 1st, He is the Head; 2nd, He is the Savior of the body. As the Church, then, is subject to Christ, so should wives be to their own husbands.

The pattern for husbands, as to love, is Christ's love to the Assembly. He loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. Blessed example for husbands! There is first the giving up Himself in love for His Bride, then the daily care of her, setting her apart and cleansing her by the Word, then the final object of doing so. If such a pattern as this was followed, what blessed households should we have! The Word of God would characterize such households. We should not come into houses and find everything turned upside down, no family prayers, wives perhaps ruling the house, the children unsubject, the husband distracted. Thank God for what He has wrought in many families; but is there not room for a vast improvement in the households of many Christians? Is not Abraham's example to be studied, as the first example we have of family religion in olden days; wherever he went, his household altar of worship was set up, and the Almighty God, his God, was called on.

But not only is the love of husbands towards their wives measured by the standard of the Christ's love to the Church, but by that of man's love to themselves. We love and cherish our own bodies; no man hated his own flesh, so likewise as the man and wife are one flesh, so a man should love his own wife. But even this is connected with the thought of Christ's love to the Church; the Church is His body, we are members of His body, of His flesh, of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but Paul spake concerning Christ and the Church. Oh, how marriage is sanctified by being brought into connection with such a mystery!

And, beloved reader, where this truth is owned and acted on (viz., Christ owned as Head of His body, and His Church one with Him by the Holy Ghost), is not this the place where Christ manifests His presence in the midst of the Assembly? The Assembly is Christ's body. Redemption having been accomplished, and Christ having taken His seat at the right hand of God, the Holy Ghost has been sent down, baptizing all believers into one body, and building them together to be God's habitation. Ought not Christians, then, to be gathered on this simple ground, bearing witness to the Christ, who is thus forming and gathering out the Church to be His bride, when He takes the kingdom on His return. When thus gathered they have the power and presence of the Lord in the midst, to bind and loose. Ought not such a position to be owned by Christians seeking the marriage relationship. Ought they not to seek the Assembly's prayers on their future married life?

I would just add a word, that obedience is the part of the child, just as submission to the husband is the part of the wife, and love that of the husband. But it is obedience in the Lord, thus showing that all these relationships are put on redemption ground. It is not merely because the fifth commandment said so, though that has its governmental blessing. Obedience flows out from the new place into which Christian children are put, as well as their parents. By baptism into Christ they are put externally on Christian ground; this of course applies to all children of professing Christian parents, whether converted or not.

There is a governmental blessing attached to married couples, continuing in faith, and holiness and sobriety as to the woman in child-birth (1 Tim. 2:15). Supposing a wife had an unbelieving husband, who would not obey the Word (1 Pet. 3:1-6), the Word shows a way how he might be won without the Word, by the general deportment of the wife, whilst the husband beheld her chaste conversation coupled with fear. Dress, or plaiting of the hair, was not the way to win them; the hidden man of the heart, in that which was not corruptible; the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which was in the sight of God of so great a price; this was what would leave its mark. The example of Sarah with Abraham is brought forward in connection with this, who called him lord. Peter likewise exhorts the husbands to dwell with their wives, according to knowledge, giving them honor, as unto the weaker vessels, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that their prayers be not hindered. Thus prayer and the Word are evidently to mark the relationship going on between husband and wife.

The examples of Noah and his family saved, figuratively, through the baptism of the deluge (Gen. 7:1 -- comp. with 1 Pet. 3:20), and that of the Israelitish households, each being sheltered by the blood of the lamb, and thus set apart from the Egyptian households, have a voice to us to-day as to the

position of privilege and blessing Christian parents have, in connection with their children, in separation from the world (Ex. 12). Moses insisted on the wives and children of the Israelites taking the three days' journey into the wilderness, through the Red Sea, as well as the men, when Pharaoh wanted to keep the former behind (Ex. 10:8-10; 15) Abraham and Joshua are likewise fine examples of parents taking their proper places in regard to their children, and bringing them up for the Lord; as Joshua said, As for me and my house we will serve the Lord (Gen. 18:17-19; Josh. 24:15). Abraham had his family altar of worship in Canaan wherever he went!

In the case of Isaac and Rebekah we have an example of the wisdom of getting, first, the consent of the parents in regard to a marriage. In their after life we see the evil of partiality towards children, Isaac loving Esau, and Rebekah Jacob (Gen. 24, 25:28). In the case of the mothers of the kings of Judah being mentioned, we have an example of the importance of a mother's godliness, and the influence they have in the bringing up of their children (see 2 Kings 14:2; 15:2, 33; 18:2).

On the other hand, we have sad examples of the evils of polygamy, as seen in Jacob's family, and David's, and Solomon's. Sad examples of the evil of unequal yokes, in Judah's family (Gen. 37), and later on in Jehoshaphat's family (2 Chron. 18:1; 19:1-3; 21:1-6); also in the cases of Mahlon and Chilion, the sons of Naomi (see Ruth 1).

May the Lord use this little paper to give a ray of light on this important subject of marriage. More important as the spirit of lawlessness increases, especially so in lands where the law allows divorce for the slightest occasions. The consequence is that all true scriptural government, whether in the nation or family, is turned upside down.

I send this paper out, not as exhausting this subject, but as believing in its importance specially for my younger brethren and fellow-laborers, and not being without encouragement in the sense that the Lord led me to write it, and of having His approval. In days of increasing corruption it is important to have God's principles of truth before us, so that we who are His may be kept from the downward stream of lawlessness and corruption that are setting in on every side.

A. P. C.

Matthew 19:9 (cp. Matt. 5:32) Teaches That There Is Only One Ground for Divorce

Collection of Quotations Concerning One Basis for Divorce

A large number of quotations are given below that indicate belief that there is only one scriptural ground for divorce. We begin with repeating what A. P. Cecil said in the opening of the quotation from him above:

Only, therefore, for one cause was divorce sanctioned, and that for the sin of fornication. ⁷ ❖

Here our Lord adds what was not the law, and brings out the full mind of God touching this relationship. There is but one just cause for which it may be dissolved; or rather marriage must be dissolved morally in order to terminate as a matter of fact. In case of fornication, the tie is all gone before God. Such a union is incompatible with that sin; and then the putting away of the wife merely proclaims before others what has already taken place in His sight. All is made perfectly clear. The righteousness of the law is established as far as it goes, but it stops short of perfection by admitting in certain cases a less evil to avoid a greater. And then we have our Lord supplying the needed truth -- going up to the very beginning, and on to the end also. Thus it is that Christ, the true light, alone, and always, introduces the perfect mind of God, supplying all deficiencies and making all perfect. This is the aim, work and effect of grace. ⁸ ❖

God's mind is clear from the first; adultery alone justifies divorce. ⁹ ❖

They have their objection from the law ready: "Why then did Moses command to give her a writing of divorcement and to put her away?" But they did not apprehend aright either Moses or themselves: and their argument is turned against them in the simplest manner: "Moses, for the hardness of your hearts SUFFERED you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so." It was Moses himself who was furnishing the evidence, and what an evidence, of their own condition! The law, which was "weak through the flesh," could not perfect anything because of the resistance to it of a carnal

7. *Marriage*, p. 7.

8. W. Kelly, *Lectures on the Gospel of Matthew*, on Matt. 19. Also found in *The Bible Treasury* 4:197 (1863).

9. W. Kelly in *The Bible Treasury*, New Series 4:295.

people. That which they objected proved but at the same time their own evil and the hopelessness of it under law. And He turned upon them with one of those imperial sayings which put aside all power of resistance as with the lightning-flash of truth; "And I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife except for fornication, and shall marry another committeth adultery; and whoso marrieth her that is put away committeth adultery."

One cause alone is permitted for divorce; and that where the bond of marriage has already been broken through. Where not so justified, another marriage on the side of husband or of wife is but adultery. Courts of law may legalize adultery of this sort, if they will, but they cannot sanctify it, or take away the brand which the Lord here puts upon it. How evident that the grace of Christianity is as far as possible from laxity! -- that law is more tolerant here than grace can be. But the palliatives of law were only the proof that it could not heal; grace will not palliate, because it heals.

This, let us remember however, is the abstract right of the matter -- binding of course, as such, with all the authority that the Lord's words can give it upon every one of His own. He does not pursue it further, nor consider the complications that may arise in a world such as this which knows Him not, and where His people may be entangled with alliances with the unbelieving or followed by the consequences of their conduct before conversion. This manifestly belongs rather to what concerns the discipline of the Church, and we shall find the principles applying to it in their place in the epistles. It will be the proper place, therefore, to consider them there, though for the help of souls a few words here may be in place.

We are all born in sin, and go astray naturally from the womb, except as the grace of God may prevent this. When converted to God we may have spent a large part of our lives in disobedience; the effects of which are not necessarily removed by our return to the position in which we were before the sin was committed. Thus the Lord has Himself decided in the case of a divorced wife, after marriage to another, even though death has dissolved the newer relationship. For the former husband then to take her back again is declared to be an "abomination" to Him (Deut. 24:4); and no ordinance of the God of nature. Hence restoration to a past state may be, and will commonly be, where divorce has taken place, a thing impracticable. We have but to accept things as they are, and rejoice in the mercy that has blotted out the past, and enables us to start afresh, with Him.

Again, there are cases in which *separation* may be a necessity or allowable, where divorce could not be according to God; separation leaving yet room for the mercy of God to come in and restore; and this door the apostle opens in Corinthians (1 Cor. vii. 15), not too widely.

Divorce he does not touch: for the Lord has decided there. ¹⁰ ❖

The Lord peremptorily, and on His own authority, restricts the allowance of it to that one ground which plainly destroys the very idea of marriage; and declares the putting away of one's wife for any other cause to be making her to commit adultery by another union. Also he who marries such a divorced one commits adultery. ¹¹ ❖

. . . (save for the one sin specified by our Lord {Matt. 19} -- the sin itself being in fact, its violation). ¹² ❖

One sin only gives liberty of divorcement. ¹³ ❖

There is only one exception, which in God's sight dissolved the tie. ¹⁴ ❖

The tie, except for fornication (Matt. 19:9), should be held inviolable. ¹⁵ ❖

. . . He goes back to God's institution, according to which one man and one woman were to unite together, and to be one in the sight of God. He established, or rather, re-established, the true character of the indissoluble bond of marriage. I call it indissoluble, for the exception of the case of unfaithfulness, is not one; the guilty person had already broken the bond. It was no longer man and woman one flesh. ¹⁶ ❖

Sin may break the bond, but divorce is totally forbidden under any condition but that of the fact by which the bond is already broken. ¹⁷ ❖

This was explained by the Lord . . . a man must not put away his wife except for fornication, when she herself had broken the bond (Matt. 5:31, 32; 19:3-9) ¹⁸ ❖

Thus, in the first matter here noticed, namely, -- our Lord's treatise so to call it, upon the law of marriage, He settles it on *Church* and not on *Jewish* principles. ¹⁹ ❖

In answer to the Pharisees, who tempted Him by questions of their schools, where the fear of God was not -- He traces things higher up than the law. He speaks as the Son of Man. He confirms in all their extent, the ties that God had

10. F. W. Grant, *The Numerical Bible*, on Matthew, pp. 192, 193.

11. F. W. Grant *Help & Food* 13:158.

12. E. Dennett, *Malachi*, p. 29, (Rouse ed., 1906).

13. C. C., *The Present Testimony* 4:419 (1853).

14. *The Bible Treasury*, New Series 12:240.

15. C. E. Stuart, *Sketches From the Gospel of Mark*, p. 85.

16. J. N. Darby, *Synopsis*, on Matthew 19.

17. "Notes on the Gospel of Matthew" (ch. 19), *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 30:397, Morrish ed.

18. *Morrish's Bible Dictionary*, article "Divorce," p. 221.

19. "The Gospel by St. Matthew" in *The Christian Witness*, 4:154, (1837). The "Contents" in my copy has J. G. B. {i.e., J. G. Bellett} hand-written next to the title.

formed . . . ²⁰ ❖

Thus -- in setting forth the little child, rebuking the pride of His disciples, the Lord speaks of the church in her unworldly principles, and in her place and authority in the Spirit. And, in the course of these chapters, He comments in such a way on the law of marriage, He prescribes such a rule of perfection to the rich young ruler, He makes such promises of place and honor in the regeneration or the coming Millennial Kingdom to His servants, as lets us feel, that He had returned to the earth from the holy hill, with something of the heavenly mind forward and vivid in Him. ²¹ ❖

This chapter, then, surveys the relationships of nature in the light of the kingdom. The first and most fundamental that of marriage . . . That is, He shews that it is not a mere question of what came in by the law, but He goes to the source. God had first established it; and far from dissolving the tie as men list, He made a single pair, and therefore only to be the one for the other. All other relationships were expressly to be light in comparison with this closest tie -- even union . . . But more than this -- there were certain concessions in the law which did not at all express the divine mind; for God was therein dealing with a people after the flesh. The law does not contemplate a man as born of God; Christianity does. So far as there were men of faith during the law, they were, of course, born of God. But the law itself drew no line between regenerate and unregenerate; at least, it addressed all Israel, and not believers only, and hence it suffered certain things in view of the hardness of their hearts. So that our Lord, while intimating a certain consideration of Israel's condition in the flesh, at the same time vindicated God's law from the corrupt deductions of these selfish Pharisees. "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, comitteth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (vv. 8, 9).

Here our Lord adds what was not in the law, and brings out the full mind of God touching this relationship. There is but one just cause for which it may be dissolved . . . ²² ❖

{Matt.} Chapter 19. brings in another lesson of great weight. Whatever might be the Church or the kingdom, it is precisely when the Lord unfolds His new glory in both the kingdom and the Church that He maintains the proprieties of nature in their rights and integrity. There is no greater mistake than to suppose, because there is the richest development of God's grace in new things, that He abandons or weakens natural relationships and authority in their place.

20. "The Gospel According to Matthew" in, *The Prospect* 1:131 (1850), edited by W. Kelly.

21. J. G. Bellett, "On the Gospel by St. Matthew," p. 46 (1859); found in *The Evangelists*.

22. W. Kelly, *Lectures on the Gospel of Matthew*, A. S. Rouse: London, pp. 406, 408 (1896). First given out as lectures, it then appeared in *The Bible Treasury* 4:197 during 1862 and 1863. It was printed in book form in February 1868, and reprinted subsequently.

This, I believe, is a great lesson, and too often forgotten. Observe that it is at this point the chapter begins with vindicating the sanctity of marriage. No doubt it is a tie of nature for this life only. None the less does the Lord uphold it, purged of what accretions had come in to obscure its original and proper character. Thus the fresh revelations of grace in no way detract from that which God had of old established in nature; but contrariwise, only impart a new and greater force in asserting the real value and wisdom of God's way even in these least things.²³ ❖

Another subject begins in the 19th chapter: that of natural relationships in their connection with the kingdom. They are sanctioned fully, and freed from that which Moses had had to yield to the hardness of men's hearts. Grace maintained God's order in the first creation, as it enables men, if need were for the kingdom of heaven's sake, to walk superior to the natural instincts. Again, little children are received of Christ and blessed, for of such was the kingdom of heaven. Throughout all this we see plainly that grace is acting in the fullest way.²⁴ ❖

The Lord's words, while addressed to Israelites, cannot surely be less binding upon Christians of the present day. It is plain that Christianity cannot be supposed to require a lower morality than He enforces here, not as a national or ecclesiastical regulation, but just *as* morality. What is 'adultery' according to Him must be ever adultery; and no law of man can alter this in the slightest degree. Let the Lord's people look to it, in a day when men are doing their own will with continually more audacity.²⁵ ❖

The Lord goes back behind the law to God's original institution: "He which made them at the beginning . . . From the beginning it was not so." Thus God's natural order, the relationship He had formed, origin of all other human relationships is restored by Christ's authority. He returns to God and God's institution of man. It is not Jehovah, it is not "my Father," but God made them -- a very important principle. The law takes its place as a provisional thing by the bye. Looked at as a Jewish law, a law of ordinances, God had made allowance for the hardness of the human heart, and now returned to His own thoughts and institutions. God's order created order.²⁶ ❖

In answer to the Pharisees, who tempted Him by questions of their schools, where the fear of God was not -- He traces things higher up than the law. He speaks as the Son of Man. He confirms, in all their extent, the ties that God had formed; the ordinance of Moses did not suffer the hardness of their heart. The law just recognized the relationships which preceded it; what was more than

23. W. Kelly, *Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospel* London: W. H. Broom, p. 81 (1874).
 24. "The Gospel by Matthew," in *Helps By the Way*, New Series 1:189 (1879).
 25. F. W. Grant in *Help & Food* 13:158 (1895).
 26. J. N. Darby, *Collected Writings* 24:168. (24:253, Morrish ed.).

those relationships was only for a time.²⁷ ❖

Our guide has been the Holy Scriptures and not the laws and opinions of men, however good they may be. The Lord's words in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 have been before *us* as rejecting all other ground for divorce save the solitary one therein mentioned.²⁸ ❖

All through the history of "Brethren" it has been held that in the exceptional case referred to, by the Lord, twice in Matthew (5:32; 19:9), the innocent person might remarry (See Mr. Darby's Letters and Synopsis).²⁹ ❖

Matt. 19:9 Contains Two Propositions

It is false that it is only an "inference" that the one offended against³⁰ in Matt. 19:9 is permitted to remarry. *An exception clause in a proposition creates a second proposition.* Thus:

- (1) Whoever divorces his wife, not on the basis of fornication, and marries another, he thus commits adultery.
- (2) Whoever divorces his wife, on the basis of her fornication, and marries another, he does not commit adultery.

Why Is the Exception Clause Found Only in Matthew?

This reminds us of the fact that the church is also only mentioned in Matthew's gospel. Yes, there is a Jewish aspect to Matthew's gospel but it is unhelpful to bring that forward against what has been said -- for the purpose of confining Matt. 19:9 to something Jewish. It is also not correct to confine the words about

27. *Ibid.*, p. 38 (pp. 57, 58 Morrish ed.).

28. Letter of May 28, 1932 supporting no divorce and no remarriage position, signed by William Stradling and Hugh Dickson, quoting from a letter by Frank Gill (the son of Alfred Gill). Emphasis is as in the quotation.

29. Letter from Renton, WA, April 15, 1930, "To Saints Gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ Elsewhere," signed by B. Murr, C. J. Anderson, Edward Leighton, John R. Gill, G. M. Fournier, Alvin E. Peterson, Harold H. Muir, and Sidney R. Gill. Notice that this letter restricts the grounds for divorce and remarriage to one basis, and refers the reader to JND's writings.

30. The reader will note that I use the term "offended against" to describe the spouse against whom the sin of fornication was committed. I used to speak of this, as many do, and I am not criticizing them, by saying "the innocent party." A brother who agrees with the understanding of Matt. 19:9 and 1 Cor. 7:15 set out in this paper, but remains among those who have embraced the false view refuted herein, suggested to me to use "offended against" instead of "innocent one." The "innocent one" may have engendered a very bad situation in the house, the tendency of which is to drive the other away. That, he pointed out, is not so "innocent." This commended itself to me. And so in some cases it may be that something needs to be said to the one "offended against."

the church in Matt 16 and 18 to something Jewish. For not only is there a Jewish emphasis in Matthew, this gospel is also quite dispensational and governmental in character. God's government upon Israel, His impending judgment upon Jerusalem, is brought out very strongly in this Gospel. Thus there was to be a dispensational change in the administration of God's ways in government regarding those standing in relationship to Him. And that government was to be administered in the church in a spiritual way. Such things are brought out in Matthew's gospel. Thus, government administered in the assembly concerning cases of divorce and remarriage must rest on Matt. 19:9.

Now, one may say that Matt. 5:32 is in view of the coming kingdom as prophesied by the OT prophets. No doubt. And while the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matt. 5-7) is not addressed to the church, and there are some things in it that we could not apply to ourselves (such as the Sabbath), there are things that we may apply to ourselves as principles suitable to God. Certainly Matt. 5:32 is one of them. And so JND noted:

. . . divorce, not now to be allowed save in one case.³¹

The great change in this gospel, consequent upon the rejection of the Messiah, takes place in Matt. 12 when the power that wrought in Christ was ascribed to Beelzebub. It was the unpardonable sin, and it marked the transition point to the presentation of the kingdom in its mystery form, as we see so clearly in Matt. 13. So while Matt. 5:32 appears in that part of the gospel of Matthew which shows us the preaching of the kingdom of the heavens in accordance with the OT prophecies of the future kingdom of Messiah, Matt. 19:9 appears in the part of Matthew's gospel where the mystery form (the present form) of the kingdom of the heavens is in force. Notice also that there is no essential difference between Matt. 5:32 and Matt. 19:9. The Lord laid down this order for now and for the future. Well, of course! His teaching about this was based on the order "from the beginning" (Matt. 19:8). And so it applies now and until the new heavens and the new earth are brought about.

Moreover, do you suppose the Lord was teaching the Jews a more restricted teaching about divorce than for Christians? Did you think that the Lord taught that Christians could have more reasons for divorce than the Jews? The Jews had had a number of reasons for divorce "allowed" (Matt. 19:8; cp. Deut. 24:1-4). Then He brought it down to *one reason*. Then, you think that He, by the Spirit, gave Paul a second reason? Is that what you think?

Furthermore, in keeping with the governmental aspect of Matthew's gospel, we have the exception clause in both passages. The one offended against is free to remarry (though, of course, it should be said that it is possible for forgiveness

31. *Notes and Comments* 5:70.

on the part of the one offended against to enter into the matter), while the other's remarriage is characterized as "commits adultery," as is the case in Mark and Luke also.

Summary of the Above

I think it fair to say that:

1. Those cited taught that **there is only one scriptural ground of divorce and remarriage**. It was a uniform teaching, attacked by F. C. Jennings in the 20th century (see Appendix 1).
2. This truth has general application and is not "Jewish," or restricted to the audience who heard our Lord, and is not restricted to the time before Pentecost. Matt. 19:9 restored *the creatorial order for the creature*.
3. Both of the above points are incompatible with the idea that Paul introduced a second scriptural reason for divorce and remarriage in 1 Cor. 7:15.
4. The denial that there is only one scriptural ground of divorce and the denial of point two are essential to the idea that Paul introduced a second scriptural reason for divorce and remarriage.
5. There is only one kind of marriage. There is not one kind for Christians and another for unbelievers and Jews. The notion impugns the Lord's authority. While we don't expect unbelievers to be subject to Matt. 19:9, it applies to them none-the-less. The Lord reestablished the matter in conformity with the created order for man and woman.

* * * * *

Scripture Characterizes an Act by its Tendency

It may be helpful to note that the expression, "Makes her (the one offended against) to commit adultery" (Matt. 5:32), is explained by the principle that "Scripture characterizes an act by its tendency." The tendency of the act of obtaining a divorce on an unscriptural basis is to push the spouse into adultery. Thus, if Mr. X divorces Mrs. X on an unscriptural ground, the tendency of his act is to push Mrs. X into adultery. This can only mean that if the bond is not broken by fornication on Mr. X's part, then if Mrs. X remarries, she commits adultery, unless meanwhile Mr. X had taken another woman. If Mrs. X is divorced by Mr. X, and he is not involved in fornication, that does not mean that she will actually go and commit adultery. It is *the tendency of his act*, however, to cause that to happen -- and so Scripture characterizes his action by its tendency.

What about Homosexuality by One Spouse?

Concerning homosexuality, consider the following:

1. In Gen. 19:5 and Judg. 19:22 the word “know” is used of the homosexual act just as it is of the heterosexual act throughout the OT.
2. In 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10, the word *arsenokoitees* appears (p. 82 in *The Englishmen’s Greek Concordance*); coitus with a male (*arsen*).
3. A homosexual act is worse than adultery since it is contrary to nature (Rom. 1).

The question then, is: Why would it be permissible to divorce a man who “knows,” has coitus with, a woman who is not his spouse, but not be permissible to divorce a man who “knows,” has coitus with, a man, a sexual act worse than adultery? Why worse, you say? One sin is within the order of nature for male and female, as God instituted it, and the other sin is outside the order of nature for male and female as God instituted it.

Incest is another species of fornication and 1 Cor. 5 brings before us a case of it. Such a person was leavened and had to be excommunicated from the assembly. We hardly need add that acts of paedophilia fall under the same condemnation, as do acts of bestiality.

The reader may need to look at the *Introduction* again, where the meaning of fornication is reviewed.

The Status of the Remarriage of the Offending One

The one who is the fornicator in Matt. 19:9 has placed himself in a position where if he marries another, his new marriage is looked upon by God as adulterous. The one offended against is free to remarry, but not the offender.³²

In all passages in the Synoptic gospels that use the expression “commits adultery,” it is the present tense. It is a matter of how God views the unscriptural marriage -- as having an on-going status: “commits adultery.” Well did A. Roach write:

The meaning of “commiteth” in Matt. 19 is in the present tense. In the original Greek it is not just one act; it is the continuance of it. A person in this unscriptural relationship is barred from the Lord’s table; they have put themselves under the government of God.³³

32. The one offended against is free to remarry consequent upon the fornication of the offending one. If A divorced B, and no fornication was involved, B is not free to remarry until A has contracted a sexual union with another. Then B is free to remarry. Otherwise, in God’s sight the bond was not broken though there was an unscriptural divorce.

33. *Notes on Marriage and Divorce*, p. 3, available from the publisher.

Human reason interposes and says, “Well, a man can break the wrong yoke with a fraternal society, but is he to give up his present wife so as to be received?” This is the wrong question. The question is simply: “Is the marriage unscriptural?” Does the Word of God condemn it? If so, then under the government of God (Gal. 6:7-8), they are barred from the Lord’s table.³⁴

This does not mean that such a one may not receive forgiveness from God for what was done. Indeed, remarking on the case of a pre-conversion adulterous marriage, the same writer remarked:

Conversion brings forgiveness of sins but IT DOES NOT LIFT ME OUT OF AN UNSCRIPTURAL MARRIAGE.³⁵

It is a matter of the status of the unscriptural marriage in the eyes of Him who pronounced upon marriage and returned it to the original intention that was given to the creature (Matt. 19). No doubt that continuing status has reference to the living spouse offended against, even though that living spouse may be remarried in a scriptural marriage.

The above writer (now with the Lord) told of a case in New York state, where an offending man, remarried, repented of what he had done, was none-the-less debarred from the Lord’s table for some ten years, until the spouse offended against died. Meanwhile, as one who had repented, he had attended the meetings, and then was received when the former spouse had died. Repentance, and receiving forgiveness, did not change the governmental consequence. That did *not lift him out of the unscriptural marriage*.

A. C. Brown wrote:

Remarriage is Scriptural wherever divorce is. The innocent party may remarry, yet in this it is most important to have the Lord’s guidance. Saints gathered {together} to the name of the Lord Jesus have ever received such, but refused all who have remarried after breaking their former bond.³⁶

What About Receiving a Polygamist?

THE BEARING OF 1 TIM. 3 ON RECEIVING A POLYGAMIST

In a country such as the USA it is unlawful to have more than one wife -- although it is known that there are pockets of Mormons practicing “plural marriage.”³⁷ Moreover, I would expect that an assembly faced with one who

34. *Ibid*, p. 9.

35. *Ibid*. {Emphasis is in the original.}

36. *The Marriage Union. Can It be Broken?*, p. 10, n.d.

37. I have heard some of them interviewed, as well as some local authorities in those areas, who are at a loss what to do about it because of the disruption that would be caused in families of these

married a second wife (a bigamist) would put away such a one.

It is a different matter in lands where the gospel comes in and finds the 'heathen' in polygamous marriages. The difference is indicated in 1 Tim. 3.

A man with a number of wives may hear the gospel and turn to the Lord. Such was a case I read about in a long letter to an editor of an evangelical magazine many years ago, before I had begun to consider this matter. The missionary wrote that he sat at a table eating with other missionaries (in Africa) and one said to another, how is Chief X doing concerning his ten wives? (Chief X had been saved). Well, happily said one, Chief X now has nine wives. He gave one wife to his brother! The missionary reporting this said the others were happy about that. Apparently Chief X had to divest himself of other wives until he had one wife left; and then they would receive him to their 'communion.' But the missionary reporting this said that the matter made him sad, because he did not think that was the answer, but he himself did not have an answer. I felt more than sad when I read this. It nearly made me sick to my stomach thinking of such a family-wrenching solution in the name of Christianity. I agreed with the writer of the letter on one point; i.e., that was not the answer. Happily, there is a scriptural answer. We have some help from W. Kelly on 1 Tim. 3 concerning this matter:

In early days persons were brought in to the confession of Christ who had been Pagans, and trained up in its habits. Some of these had more than one wife. A true and gifted Christian one might be; but if such were his unhappy position, he was precluded from exercising formal oversight. The evil of polygamy could not be corrected at that time by strong measures. (Since then in Christendom it is dealt with as criminal.) To dismiss his wives would be wrong. But the Holy Spirit by such an injunction applied a principle which was destined to undermine, as in fact it did undermine, polygamy in every form. There was a manifest censure conveyed in the fact, that a man with two or more wives could not be set in the charge of elder or deacon. A man was not refused as a confessor of Christ, nor was he forbidden to preach the gospel, because such might have been his sad circumstances at home. If the Lord called him by His grace, or gave him as a gift to the church, the church bowed. But an elder or bishop was to be one that not only had a suitable gift for his work, but also in the family or in his circumstances must be free from all appearance of scandal on the name of the Lord.³⁸

Polygamy *in such circumstances* did not debar a person from the table of the

37. (...continued)

polygamists. Judge Bork wrote a book, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*. Perhaps in the slide into debauchery the USA is undergoing, the law may be changed and eventually once again permit polygamy.

38. *Lectures on . . . the Epistles of Paul, in loco*. See also his expositions of 2 Timothy and of Titus, *in loco*.

Lord, but it did debar him from oversight in the house of God. As to his own house, he owed the duty of a husband to his wives and the duty of a father to his children. But his marital situation *fell short* of depicting Christ and the Church. Yet, this differed much from one who divorced, not for fornication, and married another, entering a subsisting relationship referred to as "commits adultery." This was not a falling short, as with the converted polygamist, but an attack on God's institution of marriage. It differed not in degree, but in kind.

A GOVERNMENTAL CONSEQUENCE IN SPIE OF RECEIVING THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

It Is False to Say that Salvation Necessarily Clears Everything. An alcoholic who becomes saved, having his sins forgiven, does not suddenly become cured of the damage done to his body. He carries that consequence in spite of the fact that his drunkenness has ceased. We understand that receiving the forgiveness of sins by persons who had engaged in certain behaviors does not wipe out such consequences. But, they are not necessarily involved in a *subsisting relationship* because they once did such things. Such saved alcoholics are received to the Lord's table and there is no necessary hindrance to their eventually exercising oversight.

Such is not the case of the polygamist. He is in a *subsisting relationship*, the character of which is not changed by the forgiveness of sins. The forgiveness of sins is a *judicial* matter on God's part. In this case there *is* a *governmental* consequence of this subsisting, polygamist relationship. He is received to the Lord's table but is debarred from the exercise of oversight in the assembly, for he is not "husband of one wife."

Clearly, then, receiving the forgiveness of sins did not clear this man of *his subsisting relationship*. It is an unscriptural notion that conversion clears everything. It is necessary to press this fact. What this man did before conversion disbars him from oversight as a Christian.

Circumstances That Only God Can Change. Suppose such a case where a man had two wives, and then after some time, one died. He would then be "husband of one wife." Thus, God changed his circumstances. Yes, it is possible to be in circumstances that only God can change.

The matter of polygamy helps us with the case of one who has unscripturally divorced his spouse and married another.

One in a Marriage Characterized as "Commits Adultery" is Debarred from the Lord's Table. If he was a Christian when he unscripturally remarried, and repents, and receives forgiveness from God, yet the consequence subsists: he "commits adultery," says Matt. 19:9. "*Commits adultery*" is stated in the present tense in all the relevant passages. He is to submit to the government of God about that characterization of his relationship (as the saved polygamist must also do

regarding the particular governmental consequence stated in Scripture concerning his case). Is it not clear that one whom God regards as in a subsisting relationship which He designates as “commits adultery” is debarred from the Lord’s table? On the other hand, his situation may be changed, by God, by the death of the new spouse, or by his own death, or by the death of the former spouse *with reference to whom* the new relationship is characterized as “commits adultery.”

Just as the saved polygamist needs to act as husband and father (not getting rid of wives) though there be such a defect in the relationships, so it is not the solution for the unscripturally divorced and remarried to attempt to escape from the governmental consequence on his present relationship. He needs to bow to the government of God in the present relationship and wait upon Him. He may have forgiveness of the sin of having done the thing, and be restored to personal communion with the Lord, but there remains a subsisting fact about the marriage: “commits adultery.”

What if the Unscriptural remarriage Took Place Before Salvation? In Matt. 19, the Lord set the marriage relationship back upon what was at the beginning -- what was for the creature (Matt. 19:3-9).

Have ye not read that he who made [them], from the beginning made them male and female?

This order applies to all, non-Christians as well as Christians. Persons in violation of Matt. 19:9 may become saved, but salvation does not change the unscriptural relationship. As A. Roach said:

Conversion brings forgiveness of sins but IT DOES NOT LIFT ME OUT OF AN UNSCRIPTURAL MARRIAGE. Human reason interposes and says, “Well, a man can break the wrong yoke of a fraternal society, but is he to give up his present wife so as to be received?” This is the wrong question. The question is simply: “Is the marriage unscriptural?” Does the Word of God condemn it? If so, then under the government of God (Gal. 6:7-8), they are barred from the Lord’s table.³⁹

* * * * *

There are things that only God can change and our place is to bow to Him and wait upon Him.

Malachi 2:13-16

And further ye do this: ye cover the altar of Jehovah with tears, with weeping, and with sighing, insomuch that he regardeth not the oblation any more, nor receiveth [it] with satisfaction at your hand. Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because Jehovah hath been a witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt unfaithfully: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not one make [them]? and the remnant of the Spirit was his. And wherefore the one? He sought a seed of God. Take heed then to your spirit, and let none deal unfaithfully against the wife of his youth, (for I hate putting away, saith Jehovah the God of Israel;) and he covereth with violence his garment, saith Jehovah of hosts: take heed then to your spirit, that ye deal not unfaithfully (Mal. 2:13-16).

39. *Notes on Marriage and Divorce*, p. 9, available from the publisher.

The Apostle Paul Teaches No New Ground for Divorce

1 Cor. 7:10, 11: a Christian Couple

But to the married I enjoin, not *I*, but the Lord, Let not wife be separated {χωρισθῆναι} from husband; (but if also she shall have been separated {χωρισθῆ}, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband;) and let not husband leave {ἀφιέναι} wife (1 Cor. 7:10, 11).

LET NOT WIFE BE SEPARATED FROM HUSBAND

We have here not just inspired advice from such a faithful one as Paul (as in v. 6), but the command of the Lord: “I enjoin, not *I*, but the Lord.” The next thing to note is that in contrast to vv. 12-15, vv. 10, 11 concern a Christian couple, not a marriage as in the following verses where one spouse is not a Christian. This command is directly in line with what the Lord had said in Matt. 19:9:

. . . the apostle is drawing attention to the fact that the Lord had Himself settled this question personally; and therefore it was not left to His servant: see Matt. 19:6, and Mark 10:12.⁴⁰

Separation for Christians is not something that brings honor to the Lord, and is not God’s mind. But it might occur. We cannot insist that a woman live under real abuse. So, separation might occur; but if so, that is not a basis to marry someone else. As JND said, she is to remain as if she is unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband.

The woman was not to separate from the man, nor the man from the woman; and if they separated, the bond was not broken; they must remain unmarried or else be reconciled.⁴¹

Even in the case of divorce where a new marriage is not consummated, reconciliation is a possibility.

LET NOT HUSBAND LEAVE WIFE

This addresses more than separation. Consistently with what the Lord said about divorce, husband is not to divorce wife. It may be asked why did Paul speak of this if the Lord had pronounced about it. 1 Cor. 7:1 indicates that the Corinthians had posed questions to Paul and He is answering them:

But concerning the things of which ye have written [to me] . . .

Verses 10, 11 uses two different words (“separated” and “leave”) the meanings

40. W. Kelly, *God’s Inspiration of the Scriptures*, London: Weston, second edition, 1907, p. 72.

41. *Synopsis*, in loco.

of which are taken by some to mean essentially the same thing, namely, divorce. If one thinks that vv. 10, 11 speak of divorce only, the command remains that one is to remain as unmarried or be reconciled. In reality, nothing is gained by claiming the words are synonymous whereas the teaching about a separation without a legal divorce is lost. Moreover, in any event, any remarriage without fornication having been involved is characterized in Matt. 19:9 as “commits adultery.” We shall refer to these words again below.

1 Cor:7:12-16: a Christian and an Unbelieving Spouse

But as to the rest, *I* say, not the Lord, If any brother have an unbelieving wife, and *she* consent to dwell with him, let him not leave {ἀφιέτω} her. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and *he* consents to dwell with her, let her not leave {ἀφιέτω} [her] husband. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the brother; since [otherwise] indeed your children are unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever go away {χωρίζεται – separates himself/herself (Marshall)} , let them go away; a brother or a sister is not bound in such [cases], but God has called us in peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, if thou shalt save thy husband? or what knowest thou, O husband, if thou shalt save thy wife? (1 Cor. 7:12-16).

“I SAY, NOT THE LORD”

The words, “But to the rest, *I* say, not the Lord,”⁴² are meant to contrast with

42. W. Kelly wrote:

“But to the rest speak I, not the Lord.” For the case now in question had not been ruled by the Lord, as shown in the Gospels. Therefore the apostle in the Holy Spirit determines it here by authority given to himself. But it must have been and was from the Lord, though not the Lord deciding in person. For the question is of the mixed marriages that arose as the gospel spread. Then according to the O.T. the Jew was bound to abandon the Gentile. On the contrary, the apostle shows that grace now intervenes. Hence if a brother has an unbelieving wife, and she consents to dwell with him, he is *not* to leave her; and a woman that has an unbelieving husband who consents to dwell with her is not to leave the husband. Here then if anywhere divine authority was required in an absolute way. Is it possible then, that this decision could be no more than the “human element”?

The very fact that the Lord when on earth had not spoken as to this case made all the more conspicuous the authority of the apostle, who under the gospel supersedes what the law demanded of a Jewish man or woman in analogous circumstances of old. God owns no longer the feebleness or the partial dealing of the law. Grace now reigns; the truth is spoken according to God fully revealed; and the apostle, not the Lord in person, was here the spokesman, as the Epistle is the inspired communication, that we might have it livingly here, as we had the other for permanent guidance in the Gospels. Clearly then it is hardly possible there could be a more cogent disproof of

(continued...)

vv. 10, 11 -- which verses indicate that the Lord had so ruled. The words also indicate that the subject has changed from the marriages of Christian couples to marriages involving a now saved person whose spouse had not believed -- a likely occurrence with the gospel having come to Corinth. Besides that, the words indicate that the Lord had not pronounced concerning the obligation of a Christian to an unbelieving spouse who deserted, and what the believer owed the deserting spouse. That is not to say that the Lord's pronouncement in Matt. 19:9 has no bearing whatsoever -- for Matt. 19:9 is the order of the creation of the man and the woman re-established again for the creature by Him Who came grace and truth. It is against the background of, and in keeping with, the Lord's word there that these directions are written. We must not take these words by Paul as a basis to add another reason for divorce. Paul pronounced that in the case concerning which he wrote that the believer is "not bound." This cannot violate Matt. 19:9 and this will be examined below.

DESERTION WITHOUT FORNICATION BEING INVOLVED

Must not Contradict the Lord's One Exception. Having seen what Matt. 19:9 teaches, and its universal application, we realize that 1 Cor. 7:15 is not about divorce and remarriage. No, Paul did not change what our Lord said, and add another reason for scriptural divorce (traditionally called the "Pauline Privilege") and thus take the matter off the ground of creation once again. Grace maintains the created order and is more demanding than the law.

The subject of 1 Cor. 7:15 is: **the believer's practical position and responsibility regarding an unbelieving spouse who deserts because of the believing partner's Christianity.** As to the meaning of "not bound," consider the following:

But, on the other hand, if on the side of the unbeliever, he departed, then in such cases, the brother or the sister, says the apostle, is not bound. He or she is not obliged to recognize any more the relationship as existing. Yet the apostle does not mean by this anything equivalent to divorce, or that which would set absolutely free the one separated from. The Lord Himself has decided in the plainest possible way in the Gospels that there is but one ground for divorce and we have no right from the apostle's words here to suppose, as many do suppose

42. (...continued)

the rationalistic aim than the true force of vers. 10 and 12 before us. Not only is there not the most distant thought of lowering the character and weight of what the apostle writes, in comparison with the Lord, but the passage brings out in a singularly striking manner the authority conferred on the apostle in consonance with gospel liberty to remove the shackles imposed by the law on the ancient people of God when marriage had been contracted with Gentiles. Not the Lord when on earth, but Paul now by His authority from heaven abrogates the Jewish restrictions, which, without this apostolic word, would have surely clogged the question and hindered the will of the Lord in the church. "And thus I ordain in all the assemblies" (ver. 17). What can be stronger evidence? (*God's Inspiration of the Scriptures, op. cit.*, p. 73).

now {i.e., in the systems}, that they declare another. Whatever trial there may be in such circumstances of separation, yet if there be no more, it is a trial to which God has called the person in question, and for which He must be counted upon . . . ⁴³

Thus, if the unbelieving party in the relationship were to sever himself from the other, the believer is released from bondage, be it the brother or the sister in the case. Not that such an act on the unbeliever's side gives to the believer thus abandoned license to marry, but that the believer is thereby left the more free to serve the Lord by the other's separation. ⁴⁴

A person having left and being a long time away is not sufficient, as they may come back and the tie had not been broken . . . ⁴⁵

. . . but when a person has merely gone off now, when a person is a Christian, I should be very slow to accept a marriage as in the Lord. Have they sought them out, or proof of the unfaithfulness. If so, let them obtain a divorce, and then they are free to marry. ⁴⁶

If the unbeliever disowns it it is another thing. If he breaks the tie, there is liberty . . . ⁴⁷

All five of these citations agree. The three writers agree. The teaching they hold is that when an unbeliever goes off without fornication being involved, the tie thus not being broken, of course the believer is not to marry another.

It is clear from these two statements by JND that he is applying Matt. 19:9 as the controlling Scripture. JND wrote about the unbeliever's merely going off without involving fornication in the words, "merely gone off." I shall hereafter refer to this as "mere desertion." If JND believed that mere desertion gave the Christian liberty to marry another, then why did he write these statements? Those who claim JND and W. Kelly essentially agreed in net result are often challenged that they cannot reconcile all of JND's statements. Well, perhaps so. Perhaps JND contradicted himself in some sentences. But, perhaps, you are seeing what you want to see, as committed to finding support for a practice with which you are connected.

The Apostle Knew How to Say "Free to be Married."

Another wrote:

What is of great force in the passage in 1 Cor. 7 is the fact that Paul, by the Holy Spirit of God -- Who would never contradict any word of the Lord --

43. F. W. Grant, *Numerical Bible* on 1 Cor. 7.

44. W. Kelly, *Notes on 1 Corinthians*, p. 121 (Morrish ed.). Also found in *The Bible Treasury* 10:343, (1875).

45. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:131.

46. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:131.

47. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 3:35.

stated plainly in verse 39, “but if the husband be fallen asleep, she is *free to be married* to whom she will, only in [the] Lord.” In v. 15 he could as easily have used the same clarity of instruction as in v. 39 -- if this had been the Spirit’s intention -- *but he did not*. Why did he not write, “a brother or sister is FREE TO MARRY in such cases”? Simplicity of faith would say, “because the Spirit did not mean this as it would conflict with what the Lord had already laid down, as to the one and only cause permitting one put away (or, divorced) to remarry was “fornication.”

“If Thou Shalt Save Thy Husband? . . . If Thou Shalt Save Thy Wife?” (V. 16). This consideration is of general bearing on what has been said, both in the case of dwelling with the unbelieving spouse and in the case where the unbelieving spouse separates. It may be that God will intervene by salvation, even of the separated one -- in which case reconciliation is possible as in the case of a Christian couple that has separated (cp. v. 10). Of course, if the one who separated commits adultery, Matt. 19:9 applies.

ONLY DEATH OR FORNICATION BREAKS THE BOND

Note the word “definitive” in the following quotation regarding 1 Cor. 7:15 when JND says:

If the unbeliever forsook the believer definitively, the latter (man or woman) was free . . . ⁴⁸

If mere forsaking, i.e., “mere desertion” was warrant for the believer to marry another, the word “**definitively**” is unnecessary.

JND had no such doctrine as that if married Christians separate, the bond is not broken, but if one spouse was an unbeliever and they separated, the bond was *ipso facto* broken. He said only one sin breaks the bond: fornication.

Therefore, by *definitive* desertion he meant desertion involving the deserter in fornication. The fornication made the desertion definitive and the Christian was then free to marry another. He took for granted that 1 Cor. 7:15 has fornication in view on the part of the deserter. Indeed, in the letter reviewed below, referring to 1 Cor. 7 he says “. . . it assumes deliberate forsaking by the one who went away.” He surely did not mean that 1 Cor. 7:15 assumes that the one who forsook the believer went away. Rather, he took it for granted that 1 Cor. 7:15 assumes fornication was committed by the deserter. And in *net result*, then, this turns out to the same effect as W. Kelly’s thoughts and it yields the harmonization spoken of above. **HERE IS THE KEY.** By *definitive* desertion, *willful* desertion and *deliberate* desertion is meant desertion involving fornication, regarding which the one so deserted is free to remarry, and not mere leaving or “mere desertion,” which does not leave the deserted one free to remarry.

48. *Synopsis* 4:167.

IS “BOUND” THE OPPOSITE OF “NOT BOUND” IN 1 COR. 7:15?

Some point to Rom. 7:2 and 1 Cor. 7:27 and 39 in connection with the word “bound” and then claim that “not bound” in 1 Cor. 7:15 means the opposite of “bound” in those passages; i.e., that the essential marriage bond is broken by even mere desertion (no adultery involved). This is incorrect. Let us observe the difference in the original language of these several scriptures.

“Not bound, or, “not in bondage” (*ou dedoulatai*) in 1 Cor. 7:15 is derived from *douloo*. The Apostle used the word *douloo* (which means to “enslave”) in Rom. 6:18, 22, 1 Cor. 7:15, 9:19, Gal. 4:3 and Titus 2:3,⁴⁹ which usages are said to be figurative. In contrast to this, when the Apostle spoke of marriage as being bound by law, he used *deo*, which means “binding by law and duty.”⁵⁰ Rom. 7:2 and 1 Cor. 7:27, 39 use the word *deo*. So, “not bound” or “not in bondage” or “not enslaved” (from *doulon*) in 1 Cor 7:15 ought not be understood as the opposite of “bound” (*deo*) in Rom 7:2 and 1 Cor. 7:27, 39.

“Not bound,” or “not in bondage,” or “not enslaved,” in 1 Cor. 7:15 simply means that the marriage need not be owned in a practical way, as if the deserted one is a slave, since the deserter is gone. The fact is that deserters and those who order their Christian spouses out of the house have been known to place demands on their spouses nonetheless. The Word of God says that the deserted Christian has no practical obligation to the deserter as if enslaved. The conscience of the believer may be at peace about it: “but God has called us in peace” (1 Cor. 7:15).

THE WORDS USED REGARDING LEAVE AND SEPARATE

The Apostle used two different words regarding the issues in 1 Cor. 7:10-15. *χωρισθῆναι*, or a form of the word, which appears in vv. 10, 11 and 15, is understood by some to mean *separation* in contrast to *ἀφιέναι*, which is understood to mean *divorce* (see vv. 12, 13 and 14, below). If this is so then the words in v. 15, “if the unbeliever go away” (*χωρίζεται*) indicate a separation, not a dissolution of the marriage, as if the marriage bond is broken.

Some treat these two words as if Paul used them interchangeably for divorce. That, of course, would eliminate from the passage any thought of a separation without a legal divorce being involved. What is really gained by that? The matter of the liberty of the one who was abandoned in that way is still left subject to Matt. 19:9 because it is possible to divorce without the marriage bond having been broken. If one thinks that vv. 10, 11 speak of divorce only, the command remains that one is to remain as unmarried or be reconciled.

(1) Well, either Matt. 19:9 is relegated to something Jewish, without any application to Christians, and 1 Cor. 7:10-16 is explained so as to allow no

49. *The Englishman’s Greek Concordance*, p. 164.

50. *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (1979), p. 178.

divorce and no remarriage under any circumstances; or,

(2) The words “not bound in such [cases]” (v. 15) are construed to mean ‘free to marry in such [cases],’ allowing for another marriage of the deserted one whether or not the deserter fornicated; or,

(3) The passage is understood as in accord with the Lord’s restriction of one valid basis for divorce and remarriage, which is what we have had before us.

DID J. N. DARBY HOLD THAT PAUL INTRODUCED A SECOND GROUND FOR DIVORCE?

If JND held that Paul introduced a second ground for divorce, then:

1. JND. contradicted himself on what he clearly wrote regarding Matt. 19:9, i.e., that Matt. 19:9 applies generally and is the order according to creation and is the only ground of divorce.
2. He contradicted his above latter two citations, which are taken from one of his letters on divorce, in which letters some have alleged that he recognized a second ground of divorce.
3. He contradicted everyone else.
4. He taught Christians to marry contrary to the laws of England.

The Law in England at the Time. We should keep this in mind that divorce as we are speaking of it (divorce *a vinculo*) could be obtained only in cases of adultery, sodomy and bestiality in JND’s days, in England. The following is taken from McClintock and Strong’s *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, article “Divorce,” p. 843, with explanations inside brackets transposed from p. 840.

From the time of James, and indeed, since the Reformation, only a special act of Parliament could authorize divorce *a vinculo* {“dissolutions of a marriage originally lawful”} until the passage of a new general act in 1857. By this act a new court is established, having exclusive jurisdiction in cases of marriage, with the power of issuing sentences of *separation* -- equivalent to divorce *a mensa et thoro* {“separations of persons lawfully married which involve the impossibility for either of them to marry again during the life of the other”} -- which may be obtained either by the husband or the wife on the ground of adultery, or cruelty, or desertion without cause for two years and upwards; and with the power of *dissolving marriage* in cases of adultery. But the two parties are not exactly on a level with respect to their crime. On the wife’s part, simple adultery can have this effect, or the husband’s “incestuous adultery, bigamy with adultery, rape, sodomy, or bestiality, or adultery coupled with such cruelty as, without adultery, would have entitled her to a divorce *a mensa et thoro*, or adultery coupled with desertion for two years and upwards.” In the case of separation, the court can restore the parties, on their consent and petition, to the exercise of conjugal rights. In the case of dissolution, after final decision on appeal to the House of Lords, if such appeal should be made, the parties are

allowed to marry again, both the innocent and guilty party, the latter, so far as appears, to the partner in crime -- a provision, in our judgment, much to be condemned.

How Does this Bear on JND’s Comments? There was, then, in England, throughout J. N. Darby’s life, but one legal ground of divorce: fornication. If people were taught by JND that if deserted without fornication being involved, they could remarry, he was teaching them to act contrary to the law of England in this. It is difficult to give credit to the idea that he so taught anyone for such a case. In fact, the law as cited above would not allow remarriage in such a case. Consider this that he wrote in another letter:

A person in London was kept out on this ground; he had sworn or solemnly declared there was no obstacle as they went, and it was his wife’s sister,⁵¹ not allowed in England.⁵²

Here a person is refused to be received in London where JND’s home assembly was, because the person married his deceased wife’s sister, not an intrinsically morally wrong thing, but legally wrong in England at that time. I would hardly, then, expect JND to teach Christians deserted without fornication being involved, that, contrary to the law of the land, they could marry another.

Of course, the law of the land is not the rule for Christian morality. We do not consent to having the present looseness of law concerning divorce set the Christian standard. However, it was within the bounds of Christian morality in JND’s day to obey the laws noted above. On this point he wrote:

They cannot be re-married -- it is confessing they were never married at all. Nor would anything now make it a bit more legal if they do not quite give up England absolutely. But, in any case, I resist as *wickedness* making the law of the land the rule of christian judgment.⁵³

I suggest the reading of the entire pages 492 - 495. Consider one more extract (p. 493) that seems to me to bear directly on the point.

51. {The prohibitions found in Lev. 18 are referred to as “the prohibited degrees.” At the reformation, a Table of Prohibited Degrees was established in England as law -- and this included prohibition of marrying a deceased wife’s sister. In the 1840s, agitation against this law was “carefully nursed by a few opulent persons.” This phrase is in the introduction to a large collection of tracts and of speeches in the British Parliament, concerning that particular issue, found in *Tracts Issued by the Marriage Law and Defence Union Together with ‘Six Grand Objections’* by the Archdeacon of Middlesex, London: The Marriage Law Defence Union, second edition, 1884. “The Deceased Wife’s Sisters Marriage Act of 1907 was the first of a series of statutes which gave civil permission for certain marriages which were prohibited by Parker’s Table” (Reginald Haw, *The State of matrimony, An Investigation of the Relationship between Ecclesiastical and Civil Marriage in England after the Reformation, with a consideration of the Laws Relating Thereto*, London: S.P.C.K., 1952).

52. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:192.

53. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:495, 496.

Again, put the case in this country. A person marries, and his marriage fully recognized for years: he commits some crime which involved infamy; his marriage is dissolved and annulled. Is he to hold his wife as not his wife, and the woman be free to marry some one else?

Forcing a Contradiction. It has been claimed that while W. Kelly clearly said that “not bound” does not give license to marry another (F. W. Grant also agreed expressly), JND differed from W. Kelly. Remember, the issue we are considering now is the case of desertion because of the believer’s Christianity; it is **desertion not involving fornication**, i.e., *mere* desertion.

But did not JND say that “not bound” meant free to remarry? We sense that we have a difficulty here. I think, however, that there is an explanation of what JND has written on 1 Cor. 7:15 which harmonizes him with our Lord’s words in Matt. 19:9, harmonizes him with his own comments on Matt. 19:9 when he says there is only one ground for divorce, and harmonizes him with W. Kelly on 1 Cor. 7:15 (in net result) and with what W. K. and all the others wrote on Matt. 19:9. If this could be done, would it be objectionable? If this could be reasonably shown, the only objection I can think of would be for the purpose of defending practice committed against Matt. 19:9 and/or 1 Cor. 7:15.

What I hope to show, then, is that the key to harmonization lies in the distinction of JND’s mind when he wrote about one leaving (which he called “a person has merely gone off,” which I have called “mere desertion,” for clarity), and what he called “willful” desertion, “deliberate” desertion, and “definitive” desertion.

“A PERSON HAVING LEFT AND BEING A LONG TIME AWAY . . .”

JND wrote:

A person having left and being a long time away is not sufficient, as they may come back, and the tie had not been broken . . .

On the other hand, according to 1 Cor. 7, I cannot doubt that the Christian, deliberately deserted by the unchristian partner, was in every way free, free that is to marry; but it assumes deliberate forsaking by the one who went away.⁵⁴

Manifestly some have a desire to have JND’s name sanction the F. C. Jennings’ doctrine among ‘brethren’ that mere desertion by an unbeliever warrants the deserted Christian to marry another person. The underlined sentence shows that JND did not hold such a notion. However, it has been said that the underlined sentence refers to a believer deserting a believer. It is alleged that in such a case, mere desertion does not break the essential marriage bond; but in the case of an unbeliever deserting a believer, mere desertion does break the essential marriage bond. In effect this teaches that there are two kinds of marriage: one in which

mere desertion breaks the essential marriage bond and one in which mere desertion does not. Query: where does Scripture teach that? But not only is there no Scripture for it, the idea actually opposes Matt. 19:9. The context does not indicate that JND is speaking about a believer who deserts a believer in the underlined sentence nor did he state it was a Christian doing the deserting. He referred to a person; and that person might be a Christian or not. Furthermore, in the next sentence he contrasts this mere desertion by an unbeliever (which does not allow the Christian to marry another) with the case where adultery *is* involved and states that in such a case the Christian *is* free to remarry. In the same letter he wrote:

If all had passed before conversion, I should take it as I found it, but when a person has merely gone off now, *when a person is a christian*, I should be very slow to accept a marriage as in the Lord. Have they sought them out, or proof of the unfaithfulness? If so, let them obtain a divorce, and then they are free to remarry.

While this is poorly worded (at least when we look at it without having the question he was answering), still, we can see that by the phrase I have italicized, he is not referring to the deserter as if he is supposing a Christian doing the deserting, but to a Christian who was deserted and remarried without having sought out the deserter, or proof of fornication. This proof of fornication is necessary in order for the essential marriage bond to be broken, thus setting the Christian free to remarry. Query: if mere desertion breaks the essential marriage bond, just when does the Word of God say that the bond is broken? Is it just when the deserter crosses the threshold on the way out? or when some persons have the opinion that enough time has passed since the deserter has left? or when some persons decide that the deserted one has made sufficient effort at reconciliation and just then is the time the bond breaks? Do not these questions show the character of the notion that mere desertion breaks the bond? Where is the Word for such decisions? We have certain guidance from the Word of God concerning when the bond is broken. It is at death, or, it occurs when fornication is committed (Matt. 19:9). Our Lord has decreed that fornication is the only cause for valid divorce.

Here is a way to support the new doctrine concerning 1 Cor. 7:15 by one of its advocates:

It seems to me, in rereading what J.N.D. wrote, that there is a difference between “wilful desertion” and “a person having left and being away a long time.” One implies a definite act, by which the one who is leaving indicates in no uncertain terms that he is not coming back, while the other involves that which is indefinite, and allows for the prospect of a return. It seems to me that only godly discernment can give guidance in such cases. But it seems to me that one who acted in formal divorce would certainly be guilty of “wilful desertion,” even if adultery could not be proved.

I hasten to say that I feel that the occasion of acting on this scripture would be few and far between, and would require the godly exercise of others, as well

54. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:130, emphasis mine.

as the one who was affected. But I cannot, at the present, view this as unscriptural.

As to why others, like F.W.G., and W.K., did not see this, I do not know.

The last sentence is notable for two reasons:

1. it acknowledges that W. Kelly and F. W. Grant do not agree with him;
2. it is a pretension that JND had a different view from FWG and WK.

In other words, these brethren differed on *an issue of adultery*. And that involves receiving persons that had a marriage that WK and FWG, and all of those others quoted earlier, would regard as adulterous, and supposes that they went along in fellowship with that! Well, that is now done in the fellowship in which the writer of the above statement is connected, sad to say. And so this adultery-sanctioning fellowship (for that is the real character of it) is projected back upon the saints in the 1800s so as to make this new, adultery-sanctioning fellowship acceptable -- and, moreover, generous-appearing, as well as godly-appearing, as evil so often pretends.

Why not state the meaning of this opposition to the truth of the matter candidly? What this means is that as the man went past the threshold of the house in “wilful desertion,” saying “in no uncertain terms that he is not coming back,” the woman left inside the house suddenly was no longer his wife, and, whatever the case, she could remarry -- even with no adultery involved on the part of the person who left, saying “in no uncertain terms that he is not coming back”! And, in effect, JND is supposed to hold some such doctrine. And the wilfully deserted woman, now regarded as having no husband, may proceed with a formal divorce and marry another. Oh, it will be said, they should wait a while. But why? It is wilfully expressed desertion -- ‘I am not coming back.’ And if the deserter never has another sexual involvement -- never mind; it is ‘wilful desertion’ as defined by this new theory, and outrageously forced upon JND. But what says the Word of God?

But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, except for cause of fornication, makes her commit adultery . . . (Matt. 5:32).

But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, not for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery . . . (Matt. 19:9).

We are expected by the advocates of the F. C. Jennings notion to believe that the Lord placed the matter back on the ground of the created order (Matt. 19:8), annulling the other reasons Moses “allowed” for divorce, the Lord decreeing only one -- and then by the Spirit of God the Lord had the Apostle Paul later allow another reason (in 1 Cor. 7)!

These Scriptures (Matt. 5:32; 19:9) exactly address the case supposed, namely, divorce without fornication being involved. And these Scriptures actually cover both parties. The one who divorces not for fornication causes the other to

commit adultery. And the one who divorces not for the cause of fornication, and marries another, “commits adultery.” It is the *present tense* and indicates how God views that antiscritural marriage. Such a marriage remains characterized by those words: “commits adultery.” That is a subsisting character of that marriage.

Concerning FWG and WK holding a different view from that proposed in the quotation, the reason is quite simple to see. **They submitted their judgment to the express statement of Scripture.** And, the quotation from JND on p. 9 clearly shows that he did not restrict Matt. 19:9 to the Jews (“He settles it on *Church* and not on *Jewish* principles”), as some have attempted to do in their support of the new doctrine of F. C. Jennings, in order to evade such strictures as these.

Detailed Examination of J. N. Darby’s Letters 2:130 on Divorce

We will now examine one of JND’s letters on the subject of divorce and see how it illustrates the difference concerning “*definitive*,” or “*wilful*,” or “*deliberate*” desertion compared to “mere desertion.” This is the clearest and easiest of his letters on divorce to understand. In this letter he integrated Matt. 5:32, 19:9 and 1 Cor. 7:15 into one harmonious teaching, and is, in net result, in agreement with all others cited favorably in this paper. If we keep in mind that Matt. 5:32 and 19:9 applied universally according to JND (as shown above), and that this underlies his letters on divorce, we shall be able to make some progress in understanding his often cryptic comments, though we may not be able to understand or harmonize all he wrote on this subject.

J. N. Darby’s Letter

My meaning in saying the tie was broken was this, that God *never* allowed the Christian to break the tie; but when adultery was committed the one doing so had broken the tie, and the Lord allowed the other party to hold it to be broken and act on it by formal divorce -- did not require it, but allowed it. The legalization of it is submission to the powers that be, for common order, just as the divorce was in Jewish law.

Things are so loose in many parts of the States as in Illinois, that Christians should be very particular. A person having left and being a long time away is not

Comments on the Letter

This is the controlling principle (Matt. 5 & 19). The tie is broken only by fornication.

Forgiveness is allowed and the marriage can continue.

“Particular” because the morality of the law as in Illinois was below that of

sufficient, as they may come back, and the tie had not been broken -- only that, as to criminality, after some seven years, in England the courts would not hold a person guilty of bigamy.

Scripture. We cannot lower Christian morality if the law does. This is “mere desertion” and he says here that this does not break the tie. See my discussion above where I stated that this is what JND held; and in **net result** this comes down to the same effect as W. Kelly’s teaching on “not bound.”

All agree that because an unbeliever separated from a believer because of his Christianity, and where no fornication is involved, the believer is not free to remarry. Why? As J. N. D. here said, the tie was not broken; i.e., they are still married. And a judge has no scriptural right to tell them they are no longer married. In God’s sight, they are still married.

On the other hand, according to 1 Cor. 7, I cannot doubt that the Christian, deliberately deserted by the unchristian partner, was in every way free, free that is to marry; but it assumes deliberate forsaking by the one who went away.

Here we have not a person having left and being a long time away, but the same thing that he called it in the *Synopsis*: “definitive desertion”. I think it is clear that he means fornication is involved because he is contrasting this case with one “having left and being a long time away . . . and the tie had not been broken.” Hence he opens this by saying “On the other hand . . .”

He also says 1 Cor. 7 “assumes deliberate forsaking.” He believed 1 Cor. 7:15 assumed fornication was involved.

A Christian woman might be obliged to separate, if she is married to a wife-beater, for example.

The Christian was never to do it, and if obliged to leave, to remain unmarried or return. Romans vii. 3 has nothing, I think, to do with it; the case supposed is of being (not “married”) to another man while the tie subsists; then she is guilty of adultery -- not if the husband be dead. Divorce is not in question, but acts of sin while the marriage subsists. This is evident. Mark 10. does not annul Matt. 19; a man

As far as his *will* is concerned, he broke

putting away his wife is looked at as his act or will. If he puts away, he has broken the tie God formed, by his own will; then marrying another is adultery. By act of sin the tie was broken already, and judicial divorce allowed.

If all had passed before conversion, I should take it as I found it; but when a person has merely gone off now, when a person is a Christian, I should be very slow to accept a marriage as in the Lord.

Have they sought them out, or proof of the unfaithfulness? If so, let them obtain a divorce, and then they are free to marry.

But if not, I could not accept their doing their own will, any more than the unfaithful one doing his. The marriage is not in the Lord, and it says even of widows -- “only in the Lord.”

Matt. 5 is to me equally clear with ch. 19, but I think the person should obtain a divorce, otherwise they remain legally married, and the new connection is concubinage. In any case forgiveness is allowed.

the tie. It is the subsequent adultery that would actually break the tie. (And two persons divorcing not because of fornication break the bond *only in the sense of their willfulness*. In actuality the tie is not broken -- and this is very important to understand).

Let us not be hasty to found a general rule on this first phrase as if it were a “Thus saith the Lord.” The phrase applies to the case in hand, anyway. In the light of the first part of this letter, and of JND’s statements about Matt. 19:9, this means that the one who was divorced by the fornicator was free to remarry (or was to remain single); how this person may have behaved before conversion is not the question, but rather their condition as they may be “found” now. If it was a Christian that was deserted, now questions might arise as to the Christian’s conduct. Did the Christian treat the unbeliever antagonistically?

Unfaithfulness is the only ground for divorce, not the mere act of leaving. The believer is free to marry when having obtained proof of unfaithfulness and a consequent divorce.

If they have not sought them out so as to obtain proof of unfaithfulness and obtained a divorce, then the new marriage is not “in the Lord.”

Matt. 5:32 and 19:9 control JND’s interpretation on the subject of divorce. Where there is fornication, and thus scriptural grounds for divorce, the one offended against should obtain a legal divorce before marrying another. Where the offender repents, the one offended against is allowed to forgive and continue the marriage.

Since in recent years there has been so much ‘difficulty’ with JND’s views, I re-emphasize some leading points. There are at least four indications in this letter that show that JND held no such doctrine as that the believer deserted by an unbeliever, where no fornication was involved, was free to marry another -- but rather that Matt. 19:9 controlled his view of 1 Cor. 7:15.

- 1.”A person having left and being a long time away is not sufficient, as they may come back and the tie had not been broken – .”
- 2.”Have they sought them out, or proof of the unfaithfulness? If so, let them obtain a divorce, and then they are free to marry.”
3. “But if not . . . The marriage is not in the Lord . . .”
4. “Matt. 5 is to me equally clear with ch. 19.” “. . . but when adultery was committed the one doing so had broken the tie and the Lord allowed the other party to hold it to be broken and act on it by formal divorce . . .”

And thus his view in the end, and at bottom, results in the same conclusion as the other writers cited above; namely, there is only one scriptural ground for divorce: fornication. Indeed, JND stated this expressly in his exposition of Matt. 19.

Notice, then, that since JND took it for granted that 1 Cor. 7:15 assumes fornication was involved, he indicated that “not bound” meant the (*definitively*) deserted one is free to remarry. If anyone takes JND’s view of “not bound,” let them also take his view which leads to that interpretation of “not bound,” namely that 1 Cor. 7:15 assumes fornication is involved. Notice in the letter cited above that he said of 1 Cor. 7, “it assumes deliberate forsaking.” 1 Cor. 7:15 does not *assume* the unbeliever left. It *states* that J. N. D. thought it *assumed* fornication was involved. “A person having left and being a long time away is not sufficient, as they may come back and the tie had not been broken . . .” Do you agree with this last sentence? And, “have they sought them out, or proof of the unfaithfulness?” Why ‘bother’ if there is more than one ground on which to remarry? He ‘bothered’ because proof of fornication is required before there can be a scriptural remarriage of the one offended against.

Having seen that in substance the brethren cited had only one view, namely desertion not involving adultery is not a ground for another marriage for a Christian, we may enquire which particular view of the precise meaning of the words “not bound” is correct. 1 Cor. 7:12 helps us here: “I say, not the Lord.” The Lord had not ruled on what a *Christian*, with Christian responsibilities, ought to do regarding an unbeliever when such “go away.” If adultery were assumed to be involved in the matter, Matt. 19 did cover the case. Paul indicates our Lord had not ruled in this case so it seems to me we must not suppose fornication is assumed in 1 Cor. 7:15. W. Kelly and F. W. Grant are more correct. Thus, also, the short article on Divorce in *Morrish’s Bible Dictionary*

began, “This was explained by our Lord.” Paul did not explain divorce. 1 Cor. 7:15 is about a **Christian’s conduct when the unbelieving spouse deserts because of the Christianity of the other.** However, if anyone takes JND’s view, be aware that the above indicates that he regards fornication as being implicitly involved in 1 Cor. 7:15.

JND wrote somewhere that once a Scripture truth is established, no amount of objections and difficulties can overthrow it.

And there may be difficulties raised regarding this view of certain cases in his other two letters. These views must be judged by Matt. 19:9, and if he contradicted himself, so be it. We must hold fast to Matt. 19:9 in judging of cases.

Pre-Conversion Unscriptural Divorce

It is claimed that there are several remarks made by JND that indicate that he held that conversion of an unbeliever cleared everything.

JND was asked about remarriage of persons who had been forsaken by their mates, including what had transpired before conversion. Could they be received to the Lord's table?

Interestingly, what is not found in his published letters is the exact opposite case, i.e., could a person who had separated from his spouse and married another, before conversion, be received to the Lord's table?

JND Applied Matt. 19:9 to Everyone

We should bear in mind that JND regarded Matt. 19:9 as applying to *mankind*, not merely to Christians. Here we will again quote several of his statements that show this.

. . . He goes back to God's institution, according to which one man and one woman were to unite together, and to be one in the sight of God. He established, or rather, re-established, the true character of the indissoluble bond of marriage. I call it indissoluble, for the exception of the case of unfaithfulness, is not one; the guilty person had already broken the bond. It was no longer man and woman one flesh. ⁵⁵ ❖

The Lord goes back behind the law to God's original institution: "He which made them at the beginning . . . From the beginning it was not so." Thus God's natural order, the relationship He had formed, origin of all other human relationships is restored by Christ's authority. He returns to God and God's institution of man. It is not Jehovah, it is not "my Father," but God made them -- a very important principle. The law takes its place as a provisional thing by the bye. Looked at as a Jewish law, a law of ordinances, God had made allowance for the hardness of the human heart, and now returned to His own thoughts and institutions. God's order created order. ⁵⁶ ❖

Besides this, it is helpful to keep in mind that in England during the 1800s a divorce could only be obtained on the basis of marital infidelity. It would be quite wrong to suppose that he taught anyone to go contrary to this law.

Quotation from Letters 1:347

Since Matt. 19:9 applies to unbelievers, supposing A and B are in violation of Matt. 19:9. Thus, "commits adultery" applies to them. Then, only A becomes

55. J. N. Darby, *Synopsis*, on Matthew 19.

56. J. N. Darby, *Collected Writings* 24:253 (Morrish ed.).

saved. What is the case now? Is A cleared of the matter of "commits adultery"? What about B who is not saved? B has not been cleared of "commits adultery." The truth is that salvation did not lift A out of the situation. Let us now consider the quotation in question. And may I be permitted to attempt to harmonize JND with his other statements, and particularly that He viewed Matt. 19:9 as applying to mankind, not merely to Christians? -- avoiding the blanket statement that salvation clears everything, and which was shown to be a false notion in the case of a converted heathen polygamist?

J. N. Darby's Letter

The case you mention* has occurred before. . . . It is a very trying and sorrowful case, and calls for a lowly and retired walk in the person concerned. The refusal of divorce is the only additional circumstance. Did the woman refuse it, or how came it to be refused? It must be recent, as the court is. This may modify the case, because it may have been a recognition of the bond by her conscience. But this apart, I judge the church must take her as she is when converted.

I suppose a heathen, who had been married and separated, and had ever such a long history, and then was married, converted and baptized -- I should certainly take him as I found him.

I look upon the man's act as a breach of the tie before God, namely -- the tie as broken (Matt. 19: 9); and that the church must take the person as it finds them when converted.

*Namely, "the position of a woman whose husband left her and his child, and went and married another; she, some while after, unconverted, marries a man who

Comments on the Letter

Before 1857 an act of the British parliament was required to obtain a divorce. In 1857 a court was established to handle divorce cases.

She must be taken as free to remarry because the bond was broken by her former husband.

This is a difficult sentence in JND's often cryptic remarks. I treat it as a parenthetical remark. This case is different than that of the woman being discussed. Though saved, he is found in the state described as "commits adultery" if any previous marriage had not been terminated by fornication (Matt. 19:9) or death. We must take the cases as we find them. This does not mean 'receive him at the Lord's table as I find him.'

Here JND returned to the case of the woman. Her former husband had broken the tie by his remarriage and when converted she is found by the church as a single person who may remarry.

takes her and her child and cares thoroughly for them. She becomes converted, and wishes to break bread. Is she to be dealt with as an adulteress now the case is known? Or, the husband having broken the tie and set her free by marrying another woman, can her present position of wife to another be recognized by the church of God? Her present walk is of good report before the world; and when her husband tried to get a divorce, it was refused him by reason of his misconduct toward her."

Quotation from Letters 2:191, 192

J. N. Darby's Letter

The only difficulty with me is the question, whether the law of Canada does not require a formal divorce in these cases. If it does not, I should just leave the matter where it is. In the first place, what was done originally was before her conversion; but when the unbeliever leaves, the other party is free according to 1 Cor. 7, and if a divorce be not required, she is free according to the law of man (if it be, there is irregularity which perhaps may be rectified). As the man had left her, she practically entered the church of God as a lone woman, and I do not occupy myself with what was before, unless sin to be repented of. When I meet her now, I meet her as one whom the law considers free; and the previous desertion left her free when deliberately done, if I take Christian ground.

Comments on the Letter

"Sin to be repented of" may refer to a continuing involvement with something forbidden in Scripture. It may even involve being in an unscriptural marriage.

Here is the case of the woman: she is free to remarry if the desertion was "deliberately done." That is the view of it "if I take Christian ground." We saw previously that this involved the marital infidelity in connection with a divorce. JND may regret her getting remarried, and did have some regret about how she

I may regret her doing it, and do as to the manner of it.

But as unconverted, I recognize nothing before unless sin:

say a heathen, he may as such have had and left twenty wives, I ignore it all when he is converted . . .

did it.

A person who is involved in a marriage described in Matt. 19:9 as "commits adultery" and gets saved -- this is recognized as sin. Conversion does not lift one out of that status. Moreover, it takes two to make that status. Both are involved, and certainly one is not lifted out of it by the conversion of the other.

Here is an example of recognizing nothing before. JND does not suppose the man is in a marriage at his point of conversion. (Of course, he is not free to remarry just because he is now saved. That would involve entering the status of "commits adultery.")

The remainder of the letter deals with some considerations which need not detain us.

Conclusion

1. All of the writers cited above hold that there is only one valid ground for divorce. They expressly said so, J. N. Darby included. They hold this because Scripture expressly declares this to be the case.
2. The Lord cancelled what Moses had allowed because of the hardness of their hearts. The law made nothing perfect. The Lord, bringing grace and truth, taught one exception on the ground of the *created order* and thus this *applies to the creature*, as such. He taught a truth concerning morality that was in effect from then on, and for this men are held responsible. Paul did not change or contradict this teaching, which was founded on the created order, by, in effect, telling us that no longer would there be only one exception as the Lord had stated. Paul adhered to the created order: "Doth not nature teach you?" "For Adam was first formed."

Grace does not set aside the order of creation, rather, grace reaffirms it.

3. Consistently with this view, those who have written on 1 Cor. 7 declare that mere desertion (mere desertion is a case where “A person having left and being a long time away is not sufficient, as they may come back, and the tie had not been broken . . .” does not make a Christian free to remarry, as said JND, consistently with what he and others taught on the subject. And, obviously, if the deserter gets a divorce, that is not enough. There must be adultery in order that the bond be really broken.
4. If you say Matt. 5:32 and 19:9 are clear that there is only one exception, but Paul changed that; is it positively clear that “not bound” means free to remarry where no fornication is involved? If “not bound” means free to remarry where no fornication is involved, and it is **so positively clear**, and you claim that JND and W. Kelly (and F. W. Grant) differed on it, how do you explain that they differed on something **so positively clear**? What seems clear is that the construction “not bound” equals “free to remarry where no fornication is involved in desertion,” is a construction put on the matter that is not at all obvious -- and is a construction in direct contradiction to our Lord’s teaching. Additionally, there is an explanation of JND’s teaching on this that harmonizes his statements relative to 1 Cor. 7:15 in conformity with our Lord’s teaching, with the others quoted, and with himself. QUERY: Why is this not acceptable? Is it because you are already committed to it?
5. The wrong idea concerning “not bound” means that if an official tells two people they are no longer man and wife, then they are in fact no longer man and wife in God’s sight and may marry someone else. I am assuming here a case not involving fornication. It is impossible to get this idea out of Matt. 5 and 19 (which are expressly against the idea). The idea can only be supported by restricting Matt. 19 in application and/or by stating “not bound equals free to remarry,” which is interpretation, not the statement of scripture; and when using JND to support this, one must make him contradict himself, as well as all others: “A person having left and being a long time away is not sufficient, as they may come back, and the tie had not been broken . . .” “Have they sought them out, or proof of the unfaithfulness?”
6. Without wishing to make a useless contest out of the brethren’s names, let me say I am most thankful that in discussing these matters years ago with John W. Begg (now with the Lord), he very firmly told me this: “If you **think** JND and WK differed, then let me tell you that WK was correct.” The wisdom of this statement and the wisdom (not to speak of the holiness due God’s house) of acting on this impresses me more and more.
7. **Not bound.** “But if the unbeliever go away, let them go away” (1 Cor.

- 7:17). “Let them go away” means you do not have to attempt legal or other means to stop them. You have no obligation to do so. Your conscience may rest about it. You need not practically own the obligation of the marriage relationship. “A brother or sister is not bound in such (cases).” The tie does not have to be *practically* owned. How blessed it is to have our God as a resource in such cases. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, for he trusteth in thee.” “But God has called us in peace” (1 Cor. 7:15). So one is not bound to attempt to hinder the departure, and not bound to own the relationship **in a practical way**, when desertion occurs. In such a case as in Corinth, instead of the man taking his children to a heathen temple, the sister can, unhindered by any sense of obligation to her husband, bring them to the meetings of Christians. Desertion involving fornication, however, gives the Christian freedom to obtain a divorce and to remarry. Or if the deserter gets a divorce and commits fornication (even without having obtained a divorce), the Christian is free before God to remarry. And those deserted by an unbelieving partner because of their Christianity need our prayer and moral support. And in the case of a sister, (especially with children), perhaps our financial support as well. Moreover, we need to weep with those that weep.
8. If a believer deserted by an unbeliever, without fornication being involved, marries another, the believer commits adultery and is in an unscriptural remarriage (Matt. 19:9) subsisting under the description “commits adultery.”
9. I am aware that there are other facets and ramifications of this subject. However, the first thing that we must see is the force of Matt. 19:9, for if Matt. 19:9 does not control our thinking and practice, we will head in the wrong direction right at the start, hence the necessity of having a right starting point. And please bear with me when I say, and I trust I say it in love, and I mean no unnecessary offense, that had not wrong practice come in, and had it not received sanction from some ‘godly brethren,’ the main point to this paper that Matt. 19:9 governs the interpretation of 1 Cor 7:15, and that there is only one ground of divorce, and that J. N. Darby taught this also, would be accepted.

Let marriage be held in honor in every way, and the bed (be) undefiled, for fornicators and adulterers will god judge (Heb. 13:4).

Appendix 1: Undermining Christian Morality

F. C. Jennings' New View

F. C. Jennings promulgated the new view of 1 Cor. 7:15 that leads to what is really acceptance of adultery in cases of mere desertion; and I was sorry to see that his paper, in which he did so, *Does Death Alone Break the Marriage Relationship?*,⁵⁷ has been reprinted by "Moments With the Book." The answer to the question in that paper's title is **NO**, of course. But he used the occasion of the error of some (i.e., those who hold that only death breaks the marriage relationship) to introduce a false view of 1 Cor. 7:15. In this pamphlet he taught that mere desertion (i.e., desertion without fornication being involved) left the deserted Christian free to marry another. It is interesting that he expressly called attention to the fact that he departed from the teaching of F. W. Grant on this, by saying:

It is true that Mr. Grant denies that this [1 Cor. 7:15] means the equivalent of divorce, "as the Lord has himself decided that there is but one ground for divorce" -- that is, I gather, that although not "under bondage" the deserted is not free to remarry, in Mr. Grant's judgment (p. 18).

The truth is that the deserted one is free to remarry when the deserter has fornicated (Matt. 19:9). F. C. Jennings not only abandoned the scriptural teaching of F. W. Grant on this subject but the scriptural teaching of the others from that era. Moreover, he did not attempt to press JND into support of his view as some do now.

In the *Christian Newsletter*, # 102, May-June 1982, p. 1 (edited by J. Kilcup, Federal Way, WA), there were some faithful words concerning this matter; and this represents the scriptural doctrine and practice of brethren last century.

My friend had nodded in agreement that the only Scriptural basis for a divorce is when the bonds of the union have been broken by the sin of adultery [fornication], thus dissolving the relationship. In such a case, the guilty one may be put away, leaving the other free to marry in the Lord (Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:39). Also, in 1 Cor. 7:10-15, the case of desertion gives warrant for divorce and remarriage, if adultery {fornication} is involved.

57. First published in April 1931, by Loizeaux Brothers, and again in Aug. 1942, from which I quote.

You will recall that J. N. Darby had remarked:

A person having left and being a long time away is not sufficient, as they may come back, and the tie had not been broken . . .⁵⁸

To have married another when the previous tie was not broken involves such a one in adultery. Of course, those who will have it otherwise attempt to change the meaning of what JND said elsewhere and make him contradict himself -- in order to support *a new line of things*. So, some are advising otherwise contrary to Scripture and marriages are being consummated based on a rejection of this teaching of Scripture. One "laborer" told me that we must be in conformity with the law of the land (in which we live) concerning desertion. J. N. Darby commented on such notions:

. . . to make human laws the measure of Christian right and wrong is in my judgment a total subversion of Christ's and the word's authority .⁵⁹

But, in any case, I resist as wickedness making the law of the land the rule of christian judgment.⁶⁰

The first and most important feature of the new view is that it flies in the face of our Lord's express statement in Matt. 19:9, which teaching was based on the created order and applies to the creature as such. Some have forced 1 Cor. 7:15 against Matt. 19:9. These persons say that there are two things that break the essential marriage bond between living persons, whereas our Lord said there was only one. And some even seek to limit the application of Matt. 19:9 to the Jews, in order to relieve the contradiction that has been forced.

Besmirching Brethren

Next we will look at some of the results involved when JND is used to support the notion that the mere desertion (no fornication involved) of a believer by an unbeliever gives license to marry someone else.

1. It makes JND teach Christians that they could remarry, contrary to the laws of England. In England it required an act of Parliament to obtain a divorce up to 1857 at which time a court was appointed to handle divorce. Divorce was not permitted if adultery was not involved. Thus, a lawful divorce in England in those days was proof of infidelity by the spouse.

2 'Brethren' held that there was *only one basis* for a valid divorce and they all knew JND. It must be supposed he differed in that from them all. In their view,

58. *Letters* 2:130.

59. *Letters* 3:493.

60. *Letters* 3:496.

another marriage by one deserted without fornication being involved would be adultery. It must be supposed they would go along with JND teaching such marriages were “in the Lord” while they regarded this as adultery.

3. W. Kelly’s words cited on p. 45 state that he did not regard one so deserted as having license to marry another. As the editor of *Letters of J. N. Darby*, it must be supposed that W. Kelly published letters of JND which, from WK’s point of view, led to adultery. Do you believe that?

4. On this fundamental issue of morality, F. W. Grant, commenting on 1 Cor. 7:15, wrote:

The Lord Himself has decided in the plainest possible way in the Gospels that there is but one ground for divorce and we have no right from the apostle’s words here to suppose, as many do suppose now {in various denominations}, that they declare another.

We have seen that JND agreed, noting that when referring to 1 Cor. 7 and desertion, he used expressions such as *deliberate* desertion, or *wilful* desertion, thereby indicating that adultery was involved. Do you think that FWG was lumping JND in with the “many” who “do suppose now”?

5. Since the Lord stated that there is but one basis for scriptural divorce, the new view may regard the Lord’s words as applying only to the Jews (I have been told this). The new view seeks to have the sanction of JND, yet JND applied Matt. 19:9 generally, not restricting it to the Jews. One cannot have him both ways!

The Lord goes back behind the law to God’s original institution: ‘He which made them at the beginning . . . From the beginning it was not so.’ Thus God’s natural order, the relationship He had formed, origin of all other human relationships is restored by Christ’s authority. He returns to God and God’s institution of man. It is not Jehovah, it is not ‘my Father,’ but God made them -- a very important principle. The law takes its place as a provisional thing by the bye. Looked at as a Jewish law, a law of ordinances, God had made allowance for the hardness of the human heart, and now returned to His own thoughts and institutions. God’s order created order.⁶¹

Thus, the new view forces JND to contradict himself. But he did *not* contradict himself. He taught expressly that there is only one scriptural basis for divorce: fornication. And this is what underlies his statements about “wilful,” and “definitive” desertion as compared to ‘merely gone off.’

The issue of 1 Cor. 7:15 is of major importance; for if the writers cited are correct that there is only one ground (fornication) for divorce and remarriage, then for F. C. Jennings and others to advise deserted persons, when no

fornication is involved, that they may marry another, they are, in effect advising them to enter the status described in Matt. 19: 9 as “commits adultery” -- and this is leaven. Think seriously about this and the consequences. Do you profess that fellowship with leaven leavens a person? A little leaven leavens the whole lump (1 Cor. 5). Are you in fellowship with leaven?

* * * * *

A Christian who until now has held the scriptural teaching that there is only one ground for divorce (fornication) may take one of three positions when he finds that numbers of those with whom he is in fellowship have shifted doctrine and allow Christians to break bread who have been divorced and remarried without fornication being involved as basis for the divorce.

1. Maintain the truth and act on it by withdrawing from the leaven. This honors the Lord and maintains a good conscience.
2. Continue to hold the scriptural teaching but not act on it, remaining in fellowship with leaven, being leavened by association with leaven, thus dishonoring the Lord and defiling the conscience.
3. Change doctrine in order to conform entirely in order to stay in fellowship with leaven and deny it is leaven.

We can choose 2 or 3 while singing “Nothing but Christ as on we tread” as well as, “Choose the way, the path, whatever.” We admire those who, in persecution in foreign lands, stand for Christ, going to torture, prison and death, while we choose a path of self-pleasing. Such are our hearts.

But there is nothing covered up which shall not be revealed, nor secret that shall not be known; therefore whatever ye have said in the darkness shall be heard in the light, and what ye have spoken in the ear in chambers shall be proclaimed upon the housetops (Luke 12:2,3).

61. *Collected Writings*: 24:253 (Morrish ed.).

Appendix 2: Extract from an Article “Divorce” in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

The Scripture doctrine of divorce is very simple. It is contained in Matt. 19:3-12 . . .

It may be well here to treat of the exception which Christ made in His rule of the indissolubility of marriage. It is very widely maintained in the Christian church that there should be no divorce for any cause whatever. This position is in plain contradiction to Christ's teaching in Matt. 5 and 19 . . .

To begin with, the exception is not on its face an afterthought of some transcriber, but was called out by the very terms of the question of the Pharisees: “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” This plainly called for a specification from Jesus of exceptions which he would allow to the rule against divorce. It is fortunate {no, it was guided by God} that the Pharisees asked the question in the form they did, for that put on Jesus the necessity of enumerating such exceptions as he would allow, He mentioned one, and but one in reply. That puts the matter of exceptions under the rule in logic: *Expressio unius exclusio alterius*. All other pretenses for divorce were deliberately swept aside by Christ -- a fact that should be remembered when other causes are sought to be foisted in alongside this one allowed by Christ. The question may come up, Whose insight is likely to be truest?

Why, then, will reason stand by this exception? Because adultery is *per se* destructive of monogamic family life. Whoever, married, is guilty of adultery has taken another person into family relation. Children may be born to that relation -- are born to it. Not to allow divorce in such case is to force an innocent party in marriage to live in a polygamous state. There is the issue stated so plainly that “the wayfaring man need not err therein,” and “he who runs may read,” and “he who reads may run.”

It is the hand of an unerring Master that has made fornication a ground for divorce from the bond of matrimony and limited divorce to that single cause. Whichever way we depart from strict practice under the Savior's direction we land in polygamy. The society that allows by its statutes divorce for any other cause than the one that breaks the monogamic bond, is simply acting in aid of polygamy, consecutive if not contemporaneous . . .

Paul is the only other NT author besides Christ who has been supposed to treat of divorce. But a careful examination of Paul's writing will disclose the fact that he has nowhere discussed the question -- for what cause or causes a man might put away his wife, or a woman her husband, with liberty of marriage to another person.

If Paul has treated of divorce at all it is in 1 Cor. 7. But even a careless reading of that chapter will disclose the fact that Paul is not discussing the question for what causes marriage might be disrupted, but the question of manners and morals in the relation. Paul has not modified Christ in any respect. It has been supposed that in v. 15 Paul has allowed divorce to a believing partner who has been deserted by one unbelieving, and so he has been sometimes understood as adding desertion to the exception Christ made as cause for divorce.

But Paul has not said in that verse or anywhere else that a Christian partner deserted by a heathen may be married to someone else. All he said is:

If the unbelieving departeth, let him depart: the brother or the sister is not under bondage [dedoúlōtai] in such cases: but God hath called us in peace.

To say that a deserted partner “*hath not been enslaved*” is not to say that he or she may be remarried. What is meant is easily inferred from the spirit that dominates the whole chapter, and that is that everyone shall accept the situation in which God has called him just as he is. “Be quiet” is a direction that hovers over every situation. If you are married, so remain. If unmarried, so remain. If an unbelieving partner deserts, let him or her desert. So remain. “God hath called us in peace.” Nothing can be more beautiful in the morals of the marriage relation than the direction given by Paul in this chapter for the conduct of all parties in marriage in all trials . . .

In all civilized countries the machinery of legislation and law can always be open for removal or relief of troubles in marriage without proceeding to its annulment. If a father is cruel to his children, we do not abolish the parental relation, but punish the father for his cruelty. If he deserts his children, we need not assist him to rear other children whom he can desert in turn, but we can punish him for his desertion. What can be done by law in case of parent and child can be done in case of husband and wife. By putting in absolute divorce (frequently for guilty and innocent alike) we invite the very evils we seek to cure. We make it the interest of a dissatisfied party to create a situation that a court will regard as intolerable, and so he or she may go free.

Then by affording an easy way out of the troubles of married life we are inviting carelessness about entering marriage. We say by divorce statutes to a young woman: “If your husband deserts you, you may have another. If he is cruel, you may have another. If he fails to support you, you may have another. If he is drunken, you may have another. If he is incompatible or makes you unhappy, you may have another” -- and yet others beyond these. When an easy road is thus made out of marriage, will there be proper caution about entering into marriage? By just as much as a crevice for relief of the miseries of married life is opened by divorce, by so much the flood gates are opened into those miseries. The more solemnly society is impressed that the door of marriage does not swing outward as well as

inward the more of happiness and blessing will it find in the institution. ⁶²

C. Caverno

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