
*Notes on
Marriage
and
Divorce*

Adrian Roach

Marriage and Other Relationships

or

Does Conversion Sanctify An Unscriptural Divorce

The question answers itself by the asking. If I am living in a relationship, marriage or otherwise and continue in it, my being converted to Christ does not in any way make pure what before was not pure.

Examples

(1) I belong to a ring of thieves and get saved -- does that mean that because I joined that ring before being saved that now it is pure and I can continue in it?

(2) I am a saloon owner damaging souls with my merchandise. I get saved, so now it is all right because I started it in my unconverted days! Does Scripture teach that?

(3) I join the Free Masons in my unconverted days and then get saved. Can I be received to the Lord's table and remain a Freemason because I joined when unsaved? No, I must get out of it and get clear of what dishonors Christ.

(4) I am unsaved and divorce my wife or she divorces me on grounds other than fornication (Matt. 19:9). The Lord says I am living in an adulterous relationship (if remarried). When does this adulterous relationship cease? Does conversion now sanctify and make holy what was unholy before conversion? As long as I am in the relationship, the guilt attaches even though in Christ my sins are washed away. Notice "my sins," not my "relationship."

What Is Marriage: Does God Have Two Sets of Rules?

It is a purely NATURAL relationship *for sinner or saint*. This is based on God's order in creation (Gen. 2:21-24; Matt. 19:3-6).

He which made them at the beginning made them male and female (Matt. 19:3-6).

Thus the relationship is that of a man and woman being the counterparts of each other. It is not a spiritual relationship as it applies equally to the unsaved, though a believer will bring Christ and the Word in to sanctify it (1 Cor. 7:39).

How Is it Formed?

And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah and she became his wife (Gen. 24:67).

All without a legal ceremony.

What Is Meant by Matt. 19:6?

What God has joined together, let not man put asunder (Matt. 19:6).

It does not say "What the *LORD* hath joined together" but "what *GOD* hath joined". It is purely a natural relationship for saved and unsaved. All governed by the same principles. An infidel as a natural man is responsible to the Lord to keep his marriage relationship pure just as a believer. What is adultery for the unsaved is adultery for the believer. Matt. 19 insists on the natural relationship.

What Is an Adulterous Relationship And When Does it Cease?

A man or a woman (saved or unsaved) puts away the marital partner for reasons other than fornication and then marries another has put themselves in an adulterous position. The meaning of “committeth” 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 relationship is barred from the Lord’s table, they have put themselves under the government of God.

But does not Mr. Darby teach that such can be received? Absolutely NOT. His letters have been misused to that point but a brief consideration should remove any doubts. In his *Letters*, vol.1, p. 347, we get ONE letter involved. The words that are misapplied are these:

I judge the church must take her as she is when converted.

The case is explained in the footnote:

. . .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 takes her and her child and cares thoroughly for them.

In the letter he also says:

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.

Notice it is the innocent party in a scriptural divorce who is not barred from the Lord’s table. She was clear. So Mr. Darby is not teaching that everything that happened before conversion is to be dropped. If that were the case we would not require a converted Freemason to give up

the Lodge as conversion would now sanctify an unequal yoke in a Fraternity which has no room for the Name of Jesus.

Adrian Roach, November 21, 1979

Marriage and Divorce
An Examination of
J.N.D.'s Letters on the Subject

Preface

We can quote from Scripture or the writings of godly men and lose the meaning if we sever a statement from the passage or writing. One thought pulled out from the train of thought being developed will give us a wrong meaning. What is the chapter dealing with? What is the letter dealing with? A statement may be made as to a specific fact and I take it and apply it in a general way not intended. I believe that this has been done (not wilfully) with the three letters written by J.N.D. on the above subject. Scripture is clear on the entire matter but I have my thoughts and so isolate one of J.N.D.'s thoughts to confirm mine. What is he dealing with in the three letters? Simply this -- he is dealing with the question of believing sisters who have been left by their husbands. He is not taking up the question of whether a person can be received who, when unconverted, formed an unscriptural marriage. This question was not presented to him, but the status of the sisters who when free to marry, because of the sinful acts of their husbands, had so remarried and now wanted to break bread. With this in mind let us consider the letters.

(1) Vol. 1, p. 347 (Stow Hill Edition)

The footnote to the letter shows that it concerns a woman who was deserted by her husband who in turn remarried thus leaving her free to marry according to Scripture. The man had broken the tie in the only way in which it can be broken -- (Matt. 19:9). She was thus free whether saved or unsaved to remarry and so as J.N.D. says:

the church must take her as she is when converted.

That is he recognizes it as a scriptural marriage which it would not be had she divorced her husband on unscriptural grounds. For a remarriage to be scriptural the divorce must be scriptural. Nothing can change the character of an unscriptural marriage -- not even the conversion of one of the parties. If one is in a guilty relationship so is the other. You cannot have a marriage where one is guilty and the other is not. If the wife cannot be received neither can he for they are in relationship with each other.

(2) Vol. 2, p. 130-131

This letter deals with desertion and divorce. It shows that adultery breaks the tie but simple desertion does not.

A person having left and being a long time away is not sufficient (p. 130).

Deliberate, definitive desertion which involves adultery does allow the innocent party to remarry. Again --

By act of sin the tie was broken already and judicial divorce allowed (p. 130).

In J.N.D.'s day a divorce could only be secured on the grounds of adultery so if a divorce existed then the one party was guilty and not free to remarry on a scriptural basis. So if the guilty party remarries he then lives continually in a state of adultery as long as he is in that relationship. Conversion does not take one out of a

relationship even though all sins are forgiven. God's *government* and His *grace* run side by side. See David in 2 Sam. 12:13-14

The Lord also hath PUT AWAY THY SIN; thou shalt not die.

But see verse 10:

The sword shall never depart from thine house and so it was to the end of David's days on earth. But did not the Lord say, "thy sin is put away"?

Yes but God's government was not withdrawn. Not only the sword but David paid "fourfold" as he pronounced upon himself unknowingly in verse 6! The child died, so did Amon, Absalom, and Adonijah!! How can conversion change what is unholy into that which is holy? A brother in New Brunswick will not give up Free-Masonry to be received at the Lord's Table. But he joined it before he was saved and now he is saved -- is not that all forgiven? As long as he remains there he is out under the government of God. Years ago in Philadelphia a brother now with the Lord formed an unscriptural marriage while unconverted then got saved and saw the truth but had to sit back most of his life. He knew it was the right place and would go no where else. When his wife died he was then received to the table as death had severed the wrong relationship.

If all had passed before conversion, I should take it as I found it (p. 131).

It is wrong to take this to mean a person unscripturally divorcing his or her mate or being so divorced themselves can, by being converted, then change an unholy alliance into a holy one. What is J.N.D. dealing with in this letter? A woman deliberately forsaken by her husband who had remarried. It does not take up the man being

later converted and then received. It is *the deserted wife only* that is in view. If an unholy marriage is sanctified by conversion then, and I say it carefully, “Christ is the minister of sin” (Gal 2:17). If J.N.D.’s letters are a bit difficult, it is because we bring into them what is not there. Besides it will cast us the more (as he would do if here) on the direct teaching of scripture. “Committeth adultery” (Matt 19:9) is continuous as long as the relationship lasts.

(3) Vol. 2, p. 191

This letter likewise refers to one deserted by her husband who remarries, leaving her free to remarry. Again let us say -- it is not the husband being later saved and then being received at the Lord’s Table -- THAT IS NOT THE SUBJECT OF THE LETTER. That question never arose in those days. He says

The previous desertion left her free when deliberately done.

This involved adultery. In the same letter he says

As the man left her, she practically entered the church of God *as a lone woman*, and I do not occupy myself with what was before.

Further remarks:

J.N.D. made a difficult and in one sense an ambiguous statement as to the heathen. If he were here he could clarify this for us. But when all the rest of the letter is clear we have no right to read into this what might not be intended. He says

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 converted

He does not go into detail so there are some things we can “suppose” as to this to conform it to scripture which

J.N.D. would want to uphold:

- (A) Had the previous wives first remarried? If so he was free to remarry also.¹
- (B) Was he living with a twenty-first wife contrary to scripture?
- ©) J.N.D. does not say that this left the heathen liberty to remarry after conversion, simply that all before would not be held against him. So this leaves us with the two alternatives above, namely: the previous wives had remarried, or he had not married again.

Conclusion

J.N.D. dealt with specific cases of which we have not the whole detail. However, all three letters deal with a deserted woman, the husband being guilty of adultery because of an unscriptural marriage. We do not know fully his thought as to the heathen which he applies to the THEN CIRCUMSTANCES which do not deal with the reception of a now converted person in an adulterous marriage. Remember that marriage was set up on a natural basis:

Therefore shall a *man* (it does not say a believer) leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh (Gen. 2:24 and Matt. 19:5).

God does not have two standards of marriage -- one for believers and one for unbelievers. What is adultery to the unsaved is adultery to the saved. Conversion brings forgiveness of sins but IT DOES NOT LIFT ME OUT

1. I take (A) as being what J.N.D. supposed in his letter as he was speaking of one free to remarry.

OF AN UNSCRIPTURAL MARRIAGE. 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.

Suppose a believing woman married to an unconverted man unscripturally divorced. What does scripture say? "Committeth adultery" and that is in the abiding sense. He then gets saved; is he to be treated in any different way than she? Why is she excluded? Because of the wrong marriage. She is in relation to him and this is unscriptural. How can he be received when it is her relation to him that is unscriptural? How can one be guilty and the other not? It is the MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP that is evil before God. We must lose sight of individuals and take unqualified statements of the Word.

May these thoughts turn us the more to the Word for guidance.

Adrian Roach, January 15, 1980

Extract from a Letter on Marriage

The question as to Matt. 19: 9 is of great importance. There is a case in another gathering in which that gathering has called for help in the understanding from Scripture. Several godly brethren have considered it and some have discussed it with me. We are desirous of all the help we can get from well taught and responsible brethren. Bro. Gill's pamphlet is a familiar one and makes clear the right of the innocent party to remarry. I have gotten much help from J.R.G. on

this subject, especially in 1929. However there are two statements in the pamphlet which my conscience at this moment will not let me accept; that is, without qualification.

Hence unscriptural divorce and remarriage in unsaved days is not a barrier to souls being received at the Lord's table (p. 6).

How does conversion turn an unscriptural marriage into a scriptural one? Suppose I changed the statement of dear J.R.G. to read: "Hence unscriptural joining of the Free Masons in unsaved days is not a barrier to souls being received at the Lord's table"?

Even after conversion the man would still be a Mason and must break that connection before he is received. Conversion saves him but leaves him in the same wrong relationship unless he acts to give it up. Now I see no difference with an unscriptural (or adulterous) marriage either. Conversion does not sanctify what is branded as sinful by the Lord Himself. Now it may be difficult to straighten out such a marital tangle but the question then remains: "Is the guilty party (now saved) under the government of God by continuance in the adulterous marriage?"

The other statement is the quote from J.N.D., "The church must take persons as it finds them when converted." Now this is no doubt basically true but scripture qualifies this. In Isa. 1:16-17: "Cease to do evil; learn to do well." (Also 1 Cor. 5:11.)

1 Cor. 6:9-11 shows how some were received as the church found them when saved. But did they not give up the practice of these things? If not, then Christ becomes the minister of sin and by saving them sanctifies their evil course. What was wrong before suddenly at conversion is acceptable.

Dear brother, those are real exercises among several of

us as to the case. In short let me put the matter this way:

A man in unconverted days unscripturally divorces his innocent wife and marries another. The Lord says in Matt. 19:9 that this second marriage constitutes adultery. Now this is a natural relationship and there are not two sets of rules, one for saved and one for unsaved. What is adultery to the one is adultery to the other. The man then gets saved and is still in the relationship which the Lord calls adultery. May he now be received to the Lord's table? Salvation has given him pardon but how does it change the character of the relationship? The pamphlet of J.R.G. does not, as I see it, answer this question. I agree with you that it is far better to be occupied with the things that edify but it is also important to consider those things that affect the glory of the Lord as the Holy One in the midst. We shall need this exercise all our days down here.

Adrian Roach, from a letter dated April 23, 1969.

Note: A much more extensive set of notes along the same lines is available from the publisher: *Marriage, Divorce, and Separation*.

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