

Purity in Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

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This paper was written shortly before the death of its author. The chapter titles and the order of the chapters, as well as normal editorial corrections for clarity and to fix typographical errors were provided by an editor.

— ed.

Chapter 1: Purity of Marriage

Marriage and the Mystery

Wives, [submit yourselves] to your own husbands, as to the Lord, for a husband is head of the wife, as also the Christ [is] head of the assembly. *He* is Saviour of the body. But even as the assembly is subjected to the Christ, so also wives to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your own wives, even as the Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it, in order that he might sanctify it, purifying [it] by the washing of water by [the] word, that *He* might present the assembly to himself glorious, having no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things; but that it might be holy and blameless. So ought men also to love their own wives as their own bodies: he that loves his own wife loves himself. For no one has ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as also the Christ the assembly: for we are members of his body; [we are of his flesh, and of his bones.] Because of this a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall be united to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh. This mystery is great, but I speak as to Christ, and as to the assembly. But ye also, every one of you, let each so love his own wife as himself; but as to the wife [I speak] that she may fear the husband. (*Ephesians 5:22-33*).

We here have marriage presented in its grandest aspect. It has in view Christ and the church, the great mystery as to which silence had been kept in the times of the ages (Rom. 16:25, 26). Yes, it was hidden from the time periods and all the peoples (Col. 1:26), hidden throughout the ages in God (Eph. 3:10), but now manifested. Christ has died (as Adam slept) and that precious stream of water and of blood, which from Christ's side so freely flowed, has cleaned us from the dirtiness of sin (the water) and has expiated guilt (the blood). These have the value and glory of the death, and of the three hours of suffering, which all have the value and glory of His Person imparted to them. The value and glory of His work is commensurate with the value and glory of His Person -- immeasurable.

Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:25). Is the church to submit to Him? "But even as the assembly is subjected to the Christ" (Eph. 5:24) tells us that the assembly has been set in the subject place. As Christ is the head of the assembly, so is the husband the head of the wife (Eph. 5:24). This truth is increasingly unpopular. What does it mean for a woman to say that, yes, man is the head but woman is the neck -- in order to turn the head the way she wants. Not so, the neck turns the way the head directs. What mean the words: "so also wives to

their own husbands in everything”? Sister in Christ, look long and intently on those words “*in everything*,” and be ever conscious that your marriage is a finger pointing to Christ and the assembly (to use the words of G. V. Wigram), to Christ’s position regarding the assembly. It is the practical acknowledgment of Christ’s place regarding the assembly. This subjection to your husband, acknowledging and pointing to Christ’s place, is the high calling to which God has called you.

The love wherewith the husband is to love his wife also points to Christ and the assembly. There is something for the husband to look long and intently on, namely, “Husbands, love your own wives, even as the Christ has loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it . . .” (Eph. 5:25). Look long and intently on those words “*even as*.” This is the ***self-sacrificing*** love that seeks the wife’s good. It sets aside things that might naturally attract oneself, and rather seeks her welfare. The assembly is so precious to Christ. One’s wife should be precious to her husband. And so he would nourish and cherish her, *even as* (note those words again) also the Christ the assembly. This love of, and care for, the wife is the acknowledging of, and pointing to, Christ’s love and care for the assembly, and this is the high calling to which you have been called. If we were exercised about it, and in prayer to Him who is the head of the assembly, we would, by His grace, make discoveries of how to so minister to the wife.

These truths, diligently practiced, would render a lovely portrayal of Christ and the church. Yes, we fall short but the standard must not be lowered. And would we want God to put before us something lower? On whose side, the husband’s or the wife’s, should the standard be lower? -- or, on both sides? How much lower? If we know the heart of Christ, the thought should be revolting to us.

And, needless to say, the mutual practice of these respective truths would contribute to purity in marriage, as well as contribute much else also.

Here is a short address given by G. V. Wigram, followed by one of his letters:

A Marriage Address

Gen. 2:18-24; Eph. 5:22-33

It is an immense sphere if one looks at the scene laid there in the garden, and, on the other hand, at that scene in which the last Adam, life-giving Spirit, will present to Himself a glorious Church, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.

It surely is part of the special grace of God to His people, on an occasion like this, that He presents before us so distinctly what, in His mind, this relationship in which many of us stand, and in which this day our brother and sister are entering, points to; not merely to Adam at first, with Eve a help-meet for him, but to that amazing counsel of God brought out since Pentecost. Now the Lord Jesus Christ, the last Adam, will present a bride to Himself, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.

I feel the immense importance of this at the present time, because all relationships are made so little of amongst men, no natural affection . . . Therefore on entering into any new relationship, it is very important to look to it, whether or not we apprehend it, and stand in that measure of grace which the word of God presents to us as a privilege, to those who love the Lord in sincerity and truth.

We get the word in Genesis about the man leaving father and mother and cleaving to the wife repeated in Eph. 5:31. We have also,

As the Church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.

Oh, what a word that is! God subjected the Church to Christ, chose her in Him before the foundation of the world; and subjected her to Christ not only for the wilderness, but for eternity, even for the paradise of God, where the Lord Jesus Christ will take her to Himself. She has nothing whatever apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, and He has beautifully put forth what He felt as the responsible One. He has done, He does, and will do every thing. His thoughts have not changed in the least during the six thousand years of man's rebellion. He has done and won all for us; and with the same large heart that took us up, He gives us promises, declaring that the same glory which the Father gave to Him, He will give to us.

We have found Him the One whose thoughts always are characterized by,

Lo, I come to do thy will, O God;

and in the good pleasure of *His* will Christ became the *shelter* of the Church. That is a solemn word when one looks around the world on all the miseries of domestic life, and sees how little the husbands know how to be the shelter of the wives; how little as individual Christians we know how to walk like Christ, to say,

This must be done, because it is the will of the Father,

That must not be done, because it is not the will of the Father,

and at the same time to be the *perfect shelter*. The wife should have to recognize, "This is the Father's will."

What a change it would make with wives, if we that are husbands could take that ground! If my wife sees that I am will-less, I can as to all unimportant things let her have her own way. If I am in the intelligence of Christ, I see how He connects this relationship of the human family with His own relationship to the Church; and I am sure, if I can lay aside my own will, and take up His only, I may reckon on having the constant flowing of the water of refreshment. My arm ought to be like the wing of the hen for her chickens, the place of shelter. Of course with that comes authority, but that is not burdensome. She would say, even as her husband, in all unimportant things, where the glory of the Lord is not concerned (there she would have to stand firm as a rock),

This is but a passing thing, and an opportunity of being subject.

I feel great difficulty and sorrow in looking round at all relationships -- husbands, parents, and children, masters and servants, and friends; there are difficulties in them all, even in friendships. Who can have walked with a friend twenty years and not found it out? I cannot say that the state of them in practice is to the Lord's glory. I believe that in every case where there is anything painful and wrong, we shall find that it is in the higher member the failure comes in first; that the first to look at is the one God puts forward as being responsible . . . The wife must not say,

Oh, but I have not a shelter in my husband!

Have you no Father in heaven? Cannot you bring His power to bear on him? Cannot you put your will aside, so as to be able to bring in the power of a higher relationship? If you can get that thought, you will be able to get strength and power to meet it all.

Child, are you not as a believer a child of God? Have you not your Father's ear? You have only to show to your father and mother what Christ showed out towards His parents. Your parents will know and own the power if you are walking with the Lord Jesus Christ and God your Father. The same with servants. We who are masters and mistresses have a very solemn sin lying at our door for not knowing how to form in our houses *homes*, that those who are with us might feel to be places that they covet, and, when they leave, that they love to turn back to, and look to us for counsel. I ought to be one who, they knew, (be they Christians or not) had a Master in heaven, one ever a master for their blessing. If a servant complained, I would say, "Have you been to the Lord, and have you spread out all before Him? all before your Father? and have you found nothing to check complaint?" Of course there are difficulties in every relationship; but oh, to know what the setting is in which the two jewels are locked together! It is pure gold - gold not of Ophir, but of the divine antitype, Christ in heaven.

Marriage is like a finger pointing to the union of Christ and the Church; and what a poor-hearted thing he must be who, with the arm of a wife pressing on his own, has never thought of it as pointing to the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for that Church, for whom He gave Himself, and which He is to present to Himself without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. ❖

A Letter by G. V. Wigram

January 1, 1865

It is a happy and a right thing for each of a young couple, if Christians, to know a little of human nature, of self and of the other too, before they agree to be united together. And an additional experience ere they come together as man and wife (additional to the knowledge they had before the one proposed and the other accepted), too, is a good thing. I suppose I know what she is, and she knows what I am, after nearly thirty years being man and wife, and growing in the knowledge of the Lord and His grace, as well as of the world, the flesh, and Satan, better than we did in 1835. It is in the knowledge of one another's infirmities and shortcomings that we find here below (not leaven, which has to be put away, but bitter herbs, which have to be eaten) the occasions of pouring forth our faith and grace one toward another, and as to one another.

Marriage is a reality, and generally a very stern one to both, specially to the wife, on whom all the wear and tear of house and family fall; but you must learn how to let His grace be sufficient for you, His strength made perfect in weakness." Death and resurrection lie in that path as much as in any other for the Christian.

I think as to its being God's will you may rest thus far. What would have been His will may be one thing, what is His will under present circumstances may be quite another. It would not do for me to say to ____, "I made a mistake in marrying you." It would not do for the affianced to say, "We never ought to have been affianced." Such a step would be to the Lord's dishonor. Not that I suppose you have any thought of such a thing. Circumstanced as you are in this respect, I should feel that the Lord's mind sustains the engagement, and that if you discover ten thousand times more defects and weaknesses in yourself than you have, all you have to do is to pour it all out before the Lord, and to seek that His grace may prove itself sufficient for you, His strength perfect itself in weakness . . . ❖

Some Thoughts on 1 Pet. 3:1-7

From The Bible Herald, New Series 2:152-154

The soul cannot help being struck in reading the Epistle of Peter with this thought, that he is always contemplating difficulties in the road of the saint, and how to get along so as to glorify God in the very midst of them.

This remark applies very specially to this chapter {1 Pet. 3}. He begins with the wives, and supposes that many may have unconverted husbands. Subjection was that which the Lord had laid on the wife, but this thought might arise in her heart, I have a husband who is unconverted. Never mind, the Lord says, you be in subjection. Then the difficulty might come, what if he asked me to do anything that would lead to the dishonor of God? The answer is simple. It never can be the path of a Christian to dishonor Christ.

There might come in even the very point that the wife sees the privilege of the Table of the Lord, and the husband forbids her going. What is she to do? I believe her path is clear, it is not a command of the Lord but a privilege, and therefore if the husband forbids, it is the duty of the wife to be subject, till God clear the way, which, in His own time, He may do. The principle is subjection, and that God owns, and we can never traverse the word of the Lord without distinct retributive judgment {His governmental dealing} following, sooner or later from the Lord. How much better is it quietly to wait on the Lord for Him to remove the difficulty, than for us to take the bit in our teeth and say, "It is a privilege and I mean to have it."

What is the thought the Lord holds out to the wife? That the husband may be won by her life, her "chaste conversation coupled with fear." It is a wonderful thing to get a soul converted to God by a life. I can conceive no testimony higher of any saint, than that their quiet walk of subjection to God has been the means of showing Christ to a soul. Converted through the silent godly testimony of a woman, who always did the right thing, because always thinking of pleasing God. The fear {v. 3} is the danger of overstepping one word of the Lord's -- the fear of misrepresenting Him.

Then there is a beautiful allusion to the fashions, because there is nothing so changeable as fashion, but, the apostle says, you are to have an ornament that is ever the same. Oh to be the possessor of that, which in the sight of God is of great price, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit! It is not shown in what the world around notices, it can only be seen and understood by those who are thrown in contact with it.

It is a beautiful thing to be able even to dress to please the Lord, because the body belongs to Him. Spirit, soul, and body {1 Thess. 5:23} are all His, and we are always to be living to God, having the eye on God, walking before Him.

Verse 7. The wife was to give to the husband subjection, and the husband was to give to the wife honor, he was to be the one who should cherish and care for her, as the one given him of God.

“That your prayers be not hindered.” There must be some special reason for the apostle speaking of this.

Take care, he says, that you so dwell, that your prayers be not hindered. You are heirs together of the grace of life, i.e., you possess the life that springs from Christ, and you are heirs together of the grace that flows from Christ, now be watchful lest anything come in to hinder your prayers.

Depend upon it, the secret of power does not depend on the public prayer meeting, but on cultivating the spirit of prayer, and this applies when we are but one or two together. It is a beautiful broad principle in Scripture, and nothing so tends to real fellowship as bowing the knee together. ❖

From W. Kelly, The First Epistle of Peter

The apostle does not exhort the masters, as we find in the Epistles to the Ephesian and the Colossian saints; but he addresses wives and husbands in the next place, without speaking in particular to children, and parents. The relation of wives, as of domestics, was one of subjection.

Likewise, ye wives, [be] subject to your own husbands, that even if any are disobedient to the word, they may be gained without word through the behaviour of the wives, having beheld your chaste behaviour in fear; whose adornment let it not be the outward one of plaiting the hair, and of wearing gold, or of putting on apparel, but the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible of the meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God very precious. For thus also heretofore the holy women that hoped in God adorned themselves, being subject to their own husbands; as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose children ye became, doing good and not being afraid of any dismay (vv. 1-6).

It is easy to understand, that, as with servants, so with wives, Christians who stand in the subject place might and must find frequent difficulty with heathen or Jewish superiors to whom they were so near. For the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; and it is provoked by what is of

the Spirit in those whom they command. A Christian wife cannot give up a conscience toward God in matters of right and wrong; again she has objects of faith dearer to her soul than life which claim her allegiance and observance, in public as well as private ways utterly repugnant to unbelievers of every sort.

All the more is it incumbent on such believing wives as are bound to unbelieving husbands, that they should be truly and sedulously subject to their own husbands, wherever it is compatible with doing the will of God. Even in the OT, where such unions existed, the wife was under obligation before God to be subject; whatever the rigor that the law required, whatever the horror inspired by idolatry. The eyes of Jehovah, they knew, were toward the righteous and His ears open to their cry. The face of Jehovah was against those that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

But the NT greatly strengthens the believer's heart by the then revelation of the grace of Christ far beyond what could act of old. Not only does it fortify to suffer both for righteousness and His Name; it encourages faith by the sovereign grace which saved ourselves to look to our God and Father on behalf of others who need it no less than we once did. And if He sought and saved me, a lost sinner, may I not the more (from standing in so close a relationship) pray for my husband dark and dead as he is?

Here too the apostle gives a wise caution. The less spiritual Christian is too apt to forget the ways of divine grace in bringing ourselves to God, and to regard conversion as the simple effect of the truth, overlooking the various workings of the Spirit to give the word a root in the heart. The unbeliever as such slights the word and has no conception of its power when by the Spirit Christ is thereby revealed to the soul. The practical bearing has immense weight with one ignorant of God and of himself. But his conscience can value greatly, gentleness, lowliness, patience, obedience in another and especially that other his wife. He is well aware how unreasonable and unkind he has often been to her; yet she has borne it, and never complained, never reproached, but been as loving and dutiful as ever. He is forced to feel that there must be something that makes the difference in her faith which he often mocked. Hence is pressed

that even if any are disobedient to the word, they may be gained without word through the behaviour of the wives, having beheld their chaste [or, pure] behaviour in fear.

It is not meant that one can be begotten of God without the word: 1 Pet. 1:23 forbids such a thought as decidedly as James 1:18 and many other scriptures. But the moral weight and the gracious way of the wife tell on

the hard husband; and he is won to hear, so much the more because she does not preach at him, as he calls it. How many have been thus gained to hear the gospel the day will declare. The modest purity he knows and values much, and this in fear, not boldness or self-confidence, but tempered by the dread of offending God or her husband. For here it seems put with all generality.

Next he turns to the external habits of a Christian wife, and urges the avoidance of frivolous and sumptuous ornaments. Some may deride this: but it is their carnality or worldliness which governs. Has not the Christian to please Christ and do all things in His name? Our bodies are to be presented a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God; and we are not to be conformed to this age with its changing fashions of luxury and splendor, whatever station may be ours naturally. Christ is dearer, nearer, and more than all. And the Christian wives are not exempt. Their adornment is not the outward one of dressing hair, or wearing gold things, or putting on dress, which are alien from Christ and a shame to saints. The real ornament is the hidden man of the heart which He sees, in the incorruption (for outside all is corruptible) of a meek and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is of much price. None of these showy objects is so, nor could all Ophir buy it.

Therefore Peter was led to speak of ancients witnessing for God in this respect.

For thus also heretofore the holy women that were hoping in God adorned themselves accordingly, being subject to their own husbands; as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose children ye became, doing good and not being afraid with any dismay.

On God their hope rested, not on themselves. Sarah stood at the head of these pious matrons of Israel; but though not alone (for there were not a few saints of like spirit), she was far from forgetting the true ornaments that became saints.

Favored as Christians were by Christ and redemption come, the wives now ought not to fall short either in moral adorning or in subjection. Sarah obeyed her husband and reverently addressed him (Gen. 18:12); she was not carried away by the common ground for vanity, though she had beauty more than most. Her children such wives now became as were doers of good and not frightened by any scare from propriety. Why should they be who know that Christ's Father is their Father, and Christ's God is theirs? Why be perturbed since He sent His servants to comfort them with the same peace He gave them? The enemy works by fear; God by His love in Christ against every source of alarm.

Hence as another wrote, even before love was fully manifested, when it was simply hoped for with confidence, souls

from weakness were strengthened, became mighty in war, made armies of aliens give way. Women received their dead by a resurrection; and others were tortured, not having accepted deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection (Heb. 11:34, 35).

Thus the apostle cites examples; and this from the earliest days of dealing with the called out pilgrims, which would have great weight with the Christian remnant of Jews.

Exhortation had been already given against all vanity and worldly show, but with due care that the outward apparel should express “the hidden man of the heart.” No doubt the open man of his house, the predominant partner, might enjoin and be entitled to her wearing jewels or other costly array in his sphere. But here women do not usually need a husband’s command. Here the word is for their own conscience. For it is not only that God, in contrast with man, looks on the heart: His wondrous light into which He called us gives the Christian woman the highest standard, and thereby enables her by grace to judge all inconsistencies in the incorruptibility of a meek and quiet spirit. This, however foreign to human nature, would not be lost even on a hard and exacting husband, Jew or Greek; for such might be the lot of those addressed, and of course the former most frequently, either of them on the watch too often to spy the faults of a Christian. But under any circumstances such a lowly spirit, seen in all its perfection in Christ, is of much price in the sight of God; and this is of all things most consolatory to the tried if faithful.

Changes many and great have passed over the world. But this fidelity led in olden days when Israel’s great progenitors dwelt in tents. Yet Sarah knew to her husband’s shame that her beauty commended her to a court and a King’s palace for a while, and royal gifts were lavished on him whose selfish fear exposed her to dishonor but for their Almighty protector. But thus aforetime also the holy women adorned themselves as became those whose hope was in God, instead of following the fashion of the world that fleets away. Sarah is singled out as obedient to Abraham, and paying him marked honor, notwithstanding the familiarity of wedded life, which too often has a contrary effect. This example is here set impressively before Christian wives.

But the terms employed are notable:

Whose children ye became, doing good and not being afraid of any dismay.

They were far from this in their unrenewed state. The Lord Jesus does not find, but makes, us what pleases God. Self-will reigns in those afar from Him, with ready resentment of all wrongs that may be inflicted, and submission induced through fear, self-interest, or amiability at best. What a change is wrought by the faith of God's grace in Christ! Sanctification of the Spirit, setting apart to God in a new life now given, effects obedience, not legal but after the pattern of Jesus, and faith in the sprinkling of His blood {1 Pet. 1:2}. Thus did those Jewish matrons become Sarah's children in obeying and honoring, each her own husband. It was a divine duty imprinted on the heart by their Savior. Becoming Christians, they became Sarah's children in deed and in truth. They were not merely lineal descendants, like the unbelieving Jews whom the Lord in John 8 reproached as being Abraham's seed, not his children; else they would do the works of Abraham. They became Sarah's children, "doing good and not afraid of any dismay." On this side is woman apt to be weak.

Is there a gentle hint here of the occasion when Sarah laughed incredulously, as she covertly heard Jehovah promise she should have a son (Gen. 18:10-15)? How graciously the Spirit speaks openly of her comely bearing at that same time toward her husband! Yet did He not spare her then, when she even denied her derision. Here He only records her good conduct, and calls her children to remember it: "doing good and being not afraid of any dismay," as frequent a cause as any other of untruth. For sudden perturbation of any kind is unfaithfulness in women professing godliness. Failing in dependence on God and communion, they fear to own the truth under such pressure. Is not the caution here given therefore seasonable and salutary?

The address to husbands is much shorter, as we can readily see and understand. Yet is there not a little for our instruction.

Ye husbands, likewise, dwelling with [them] according to knowledge, awarding honour as to a weaker vessel - the female, as also fellow-heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered (v. 7).

As the wife is called to subjection to her own husband, so is the husband to dwell with her "according to knowledge." Thus the apostle reminds the Corinthian saints "we all have knowledge" (1 Cor. 8:1). It is characteristic of Christ to give spiritual intelligence which is far more. We do not await the day of the Lord to have divine light. We walk in the light as following Him who is the Light of life; we are already, all Christians, sons of light and sons of day; we are not, as we were, of night and of darkness. The Son of God is come and hath given us an

understanding that we may know Him that is true. Loved of Him we are to walk in the same love; light in the Lord, to walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth. On the one hand we are to prove what is well-pleasing to the Lord; on the other, to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather also reprove them, exposed as they all are by the light, for that which makes every thing manifest is light.

Favored as the Jew of old was, compared with the heathen (no matter how civilized or refined as in Greece and Rome), Christianity gave an immense advance. But as one apostle, who had inwardly all knowledge beyond such as boasted, insisted that if he had not love, he was nothing, so here our apostle implies its necessity for the husband's "dwelling together" with his wife. Hence to love their wives has the first and great place in the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians. To fail in such love is a breach of the relationship, and unworthy of a Christian. Alienation is a practical denial of the husband's place. Faults there may be, haste, forgetfulness, shortcomings; but love as elsewhere, so here in a position so near and tender and peculiar, should have long patience and be kind; be not emulous any more than insolent and rash, nor be puffed up, nor behave in an unseemly way, neither quickly provoked nor imputing evil, and rejoice not at iniquity but rather with the truth. Love does not change nor weary; but we need not here say more. Only we must bear in mind, in thus "dwelling together," the need that it be "according to knowledge." The vanity of our knowing, which puffs up, is contrasted with love which builds up. And what a source of instruction is scripture for the difficulties of the home as well as of the way! Christ Himself, as the other apostle pointed out, is the standard.

But a few words follow which deserve every attention. The husband, as having the place of authority, is exposed to the danger of presumption and lack of consideration. Hence the force here of "awarding honor as to a weaker vessel -- the female." The very fact that such is her nature as compared with his own is the ground of the Spirit's appeal to him who is given to be her protector. Has he never learnt his own weakness before God, and proved that in the sense of it by faith is his power through the grace of Christ? His therefore it is, never to despise, but to guide and cherish her and this in no suspicious spirit but the watchfulness of love, and the grace that pays her honor . . .

Another consideration consists of a still higher plea: --

as also fellow-heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered.

Though the married estate is essentially of the earth, yet those here in view were the redeemed of God, His children. “And if children, heirs also; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” Husband and wife, being Christians, are appealed to as in a relationship by grace which shall never pass away. When Christ our life shall be manifested, then shall they exchange the present exposure to sorrow and suffering, in which we give God thanks, for that exceeding weight of glory, into which Christ has entered as our fore-runner, whilst we are waiting for Him. O dear brethren, recognize your blessedness, and count the heaviest trial but light affliction and momentary. Look not at the things that are seen but at the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen are for a time, but those that are not seen eternal. ❖

W. Kelly, *The First Epistle of Peter*, pp. 177-187

Chapter 2: Purity of Marriage in the Lord

Marry Whom You Will, Only in the Lord

1 Cor. 7:39

There are Christians who think to be wiser than God, wiser above what He has written in His Word. Now, at the very start of our Christian path, we need to know this:

. . . elect according to [the] foreknowledge of God [the] Father by sanctification of [the] Spirit, unto [the] obedience and sprinkling of [the] blood of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:2).

Sanctification means setting apart, and in Scripture it indicates being set apart to something concerning God. Here, sanctification is unto two things: obedience and blood. Both these words refer to Christ. It is Christ's obedience and blood that is meant. We are set apart to Christ's obedience; i.e., our obedience to God is to be Christ's obedience to God. Now, He never pleased Himself (Rom. 15:3). Shall we lower the standard for self, to excuse self; or, shall we judge ourselves?

As an example of one who sought to please herself, my father told me that when he was a young man, there was a young sister in the meeting who started keeping company with an unbeliever. Some brothers visited with the sister, pointing out the violation of God's Word. Her answer was, "the eye wants something," for he was a handsome fellow. She married him and about three months later he hit her in the eye and gave her a blackened eye. She spoke to a brother that they should visit her husband to speak to him. This was declined and she was reminded that she had told them that "the eye wants something."

We ought not regard it with indifference if we see a case where a person in the meeting starts keeping company with an unbeliever and such a Christian should be visited several times in a pastoral way, to charge them with obeying the Word of God. If no result is produced, such a Christian should be publicly rebuked. Following the public rebuke, there might be such a spirit of contumacy brought out, that the assembly might have to regard it as leaven at work.

A number of papers have been written over the years warning about marrying an unbeliever.¹ Yes, occasionally the unbelieving spouse turns to the Lord. It has been the observation of others, as well as myself, that the one that turned to the Lord makes more spiritual progress than the disobedient one, who often becomes a spiritual drag. After all, it was not the unbeliever that bore the guilt of defying God's Word.

A marriage with an unbeliever is, of course, a binding marriage, though it is not "in the Lord"; and there is no ground for divorce in it because it was a marriage with an unbeliever.

Moreover, "only in the Lord" hardly means merely any one who happens to be a Christian. One ought to seek of the Lord a life partner who is dedicated to doing the Lord's will in walk, manner of life, worship, and service. One is going to marry the mother or the father of one's children. Briefly, a Christian man might well look to some budding traits in a Christian woman that are found in Prov. 30; while a Christian woman might look for budding traits seen in an overseer (1 Tim. 3). Surely if God praises these things, that is instructive concerning marrying "only in the Lord."

We should learn also from Gen. 24 that it is well when "the thing proceedeth from the Lord." What can possibly replace having the mind of the Lord in choosing a marriage partner? On the other hand, Samson said to his parents, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well" (Judges 14:3).

¹ J. N. Darby wrote, "Reflections on Mixed marriages," *Collected Writings* 16:171. Also, "Only in the Lord" is an eight page fold-out available from Present Truth Publishers, besides the pamphlet, "Unscriptural Marriages, or, The Consequence of Disobedience to God and Despising His Word." If copies can be found, *Unscriptural Marriage; or, The History of Ellen R.* is good, as is *The Deceptiveness of an Unequal Yoke.*

Chapter 3: Purity of Marriage in Every Way

Hebrews 12:4

[Let] marriage [be held] every way in honor, and the bed [be] undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers will God judge (Heb. 12:4).

Let marriage be held every way in honor! God created the male and the female (Gen. 1:27), building from the rib from Adam's side (not from his head, to be directed by her, but) to be loved, along side of himself, one flesh (not one spirit; cp. 1 Cor. 6:17), together (Gen. 2:21-23). On account of this the man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife (Gen. 2:24). There is a new household, not directed by father or mother, by father-in-law or mother-in-law. Weigh that well, ye sons attached to mama's apron strings. Weigh it, ye mommas and other interferers and directors of another's marriage. Do not rear a "momma's boy." And, mother, teach your son to obey God's Word, to respect women, to be a responsible person, to be thankful, to be mature, and let go in due time, charging him to exercise self-sacrificing love for the woman whose head he will become. And you fathers also, beware. Your son or your daughter has a spouse who comes first for them.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh (Gen. 2:24).

"Leave" does not mean 'abandon' but it does mean avoiding those interferences, subtle or overt, which parents often want to exert, especially since they think they know better (which sometimes is the case). Do not interfere with, or impede, this order. When counsel is asked, give it wisely with this Scripture in mind. All this will especially require much exercise before God if due to some circumstance a parent is taken into the house to be cared for, by a son or by a daughter.

Our great God and Savior, when here on earth in holy manhood, went to a marriage feast (John 2). That was a marriage feast *honored* by the presence of the Mighty God in manhood! Did He not institute marriage? Yes, and with a view to the mystery of Christ and the church, the truth of this being unfolded in its due season. His own marriage supper of the Lamb will surely come, His own bride arrayed in what really is from Himself (Rev. 19:7-9), in unspeakable perfection and moral beauty. It is the marriage supper of the *Lamb*, who gave Himself for her.

I wonder if there are things that would disappear from marriage feasts if the Lord of glory was present? How would that affect conduct, showiness, and silliness?

Note that the marriage supper of the Lamb follows after those *four* mighty hallelujahs (the only such place in the NT) consequent upon the destruction of the great whore (Rev. 19:1-6), for God will double unto her double (*fourfold*) for her sins (Rev. 18:6). The whore knew not the meaning of dressing with “decent deportment,” or “with modesty and discretion.” It shows what God thinks of harlotry. Consider how she is dressed (Rev. 17:4; cp. 1 Tim. 2:9, 10) compared to the Bride. Nevermore in that evil system will be heard the voice of bridegroom and bride (Rev. 18:23); but the true Bride will be forever shining in the beauty of holiness with which she shall have been endowed (cp. Rev. 21:2; Eph. 3:21) by Him who loved her and gave Himself for her.

The Laver in the tabernacle held water for the priests to cleanse themselves before entering into the holy place. It was made of the copper mirrors that the women gave. Let our mirrors serve the Lord. In them we can see if we are conformable to God’s directions, so that we are suitable to the holy place.

To say that the fruit eaten by Adam and Eve was the sexual act is a violation of this text, Heb. 12:4. It is an outrage! Moreover, the increasing emphasis on celibacy among the early post-apostolic Christians, as if celibacy is a more holy state, is an affront to our text. It amounts to a derogation of the above express statement of our God, because the marriage bed is undefiled when not attacked by fornication or adultery. Is the celibate state *more* clean? The celibate state may be used in service to the Lord, indeed, and has been so used. God will honor those that honor Him. But to attach some notion of uncleanness to marriage, or to the marriage bed, is **not of God**. Let us be careful that we hold marriage every way in honor.

Beware of flirting; beware of titillation; beware of pornography. Rather, let marriage be held every way in honor. The word pornography comes from *porneia*, as does the Greek word for fornication. Fornication may sometimes be distinguished from adultery -- as it is here. In other cases it serves as an even wider generic term, and includes adultery. And this distinction, we will see, bears on understanding Matt. 19:9.

Note well that the words “fornicators *and* adulterers” are used in the context of defiling the marriage bed. Both undermine the marriage. Not adultery only, but fornication also. Sexual acts such as homosexual acts, bestiality, and pedophile acts are fornication, as well as sexual acts involving unmarried persons -- or even married persons -- and all are

offenses against the marriage bed. Fornicators and adulterers WILL God judge!

Chapter 4: Purity of Marriage in What is “Due”

1 Corinthians 7:1-6

Marriage On Account of Fornications

[It is] good for a man not to touch a woman; but on account of fornications, let each have his own wife, and each [woman] have her own husband (*1 Corinthians 7:1-2*)

1 Cor. 7 does not take up the subject of marriage in the *lofty way* it is brought before us in Ephesians. Well, that is quite understandable when the respective states of the two assemblies are considered. There was sexual sin at Corinth concerning which judgment was needed (1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 13:2). The state was one of carnality, i.e., fleshly (1 Cor. 3:1).

When I was a youth (1940s) it seemed taboo to explain such a thing as the sexual part of the marriage relationship in a Christian address, for I never heard anything about it from such a text. *Now* we are in a public atmosphere of degradation and moral filth, rapidly heading towards the time when Rev. 9: 21 will occur. Sorceries refers to incantations with drug use, and fornications refers to the free reign of sexual degradation and riot, brought to a new depth. This text is referring to a time in the last half of Daniel’s 70th week, when the Triad (Satan, the Beast and the Antichrist) are being publicly worshiped. Perhaps coming events are casting their shadow before them already.

I never heard any ministry of the Word that pointed out that “touch” (1 Cor. 7:1) has in view touching sexually. It does not mean a hand-shake, or a Doctor ministering help, for two examples.

The reason for marriage as given in 1 Cor. 7:1 is for avoiding fornication. That is quite true in itself, but as I said, that is not the lofty treatment as in Ephesians, but suitable to the carnality of the Corinthians. Every Scripture is perfect in its place.

The sexual relationship is like a mighty and deep river. It is meant to be bounded by two banks: husband and wife. When the river is kept within those banks, it is a river of blessing and fruitfulness. When the river jumps over the banks, it spreads disorder, and filth, and destruction, and disease, and rot. It results in a costly destruction to society and home, wrecking homes and families, children and spouses. Such is the result of the flesh indulged in its lust.

Thank God there is much more to marriage than avoiding fornication, though that has its place, too, as we learn in 1 Cor. 7.

We will consider polygamy later, but note here that 1 Cor. 7:1, 2 indicates that the mind of God is: one man and one woman -- though He had tolerated polygamy previously. The Lord came here and ordered the matter according to *the creation order*; i.e., a man and his wife, not wives (Matt. 19:8, 9), nor polyandry either.

Thus, the marriage relationship works against unclean sins.

1 Corinthians 7:1-2 -- “Due” in Marriage

Let the husband render her due to the wife, and in like manner the wife to the husband. The wife has not authority over her own body, but the husband: in like manner also the husband has not authority over his own body, but the wife. Defraud not one another, unless it may be, by consent for a time, that ye may devote yourselves to prayer, and again be together, that Satan tempt you not because of your incontinency. But this I say, as consenting [to], not as commanding [it].

The context tells us that the sexual relationship within marriage has in view something called here what is “due.” There is more “due” in the marriage relationship than this, of course, but the main point here is the sexual relationship. There is to be a mutual consideration of one another. There is to be a mutual accommodation to one another. Granting sexual favors (a manipulative process) to one’s spouse is excluded here. It is not a reward for obtaining one’s own way. It is not a weapon for self-will. It is not a tool of willfulness or dominance. J. N. Darby has a helpful footnote to the word “defraud”:

It means to ‘deprive another of anything wrongfully:’ so that it has the sense of ‘rob,’ ‘defraud;’ but with the sense of taking away, or depriving of, what another has a right to. Such is the sense. I have said ‘defraud,’ as it is the same word as in ch. 6:7, 8. The sense is just the same; only here it is of one another.

Sickness, pregnancy, etc., are matters for loving concern, and care, and accommodation on the part of spouses. But such considerations, which have, of course, their place, must not be used to obfuscate the thrust of what we read here as the normal practice of husband and wife.

Another remarkable matter is that the direction to the husband to render her due to the wife comes first. In the matter of divorce under the law of Moses, the wife was at a disadvantage in so many ways. Note how Mark 10:12 indicates an equality of man and woman in connection with

divorce. There is a change from the Mosaic system. There has been introduced a change consequent on the Lord Jesus being here in holy manhood. The woman is to be regarded according to the introduction of some new aspects regarding the marriage relationship. These involve what was the order and relationship of the original pair, and also the truth of the mystery of Christ and the church. This does not change the matter of headship in marriage (1 Cor. 11:3).

There may be a period of time, mutually agreed upon, to abstain from sexual relations for the sake of some spiritual exercise -- here, prayer. If the spouse disagrees, then the other must leave that with the Lord and not seek to enter upon temporary abstinence in a unilateral way. To do so without consent is to sin against the Lord's directions here, and against the spouse. It is a violation of what is "due." There ought to be no complaint about consent not being given. A person is not accepted according to what he does not have (does not have consent in the supposed case), but according to what he does have (2 Cor. 8:12). And one of the things he does have is obedience to the Lord's Word in all cases, while here is a specific direction to be obeyed concerning what is "due."

This mutually agreed upon, temporary abstinence could be used of Satan (not to speak of the flesh) to tempt. Care must be taken.

Moreover, here we have also something that bears on self-chosen celibacy of Christians. There are cases of disability that may indicate marriage is not suitable. But aside from such matters, is celibacy chosen to shirk some responsibility, some cramping of a wanted life-style, etc.? Where is God in such a thing? In 1 Cor. 7:5 we have a situation of temporary celibacy? For what purpose? "that ye may devote yourselves to prayer." That temporary abstinence is for a spiritual purpose. Some make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom (Matt. 19:12; cp. 1 Cor. 7:32-35). In that, service to the Lord is governing the soul, not self-pleasing. The Apostle wished all would be as he, but knew this was not God's way (1 Cor. 7:7). Certainly he did not have in mind that others should be celibate so as to more easily indulge in some fancied life-style -- but rather to serve the Lord undistractedly.

Verse 6 means that the Apostle is not commanding temporary abstinence for a married couple; rather, he states that he permits temporary abstinence -- *for a spiritual matter*. Does it need to be said that abstinence is the proper order for the unmarried?

We have only touched on what bears on purity, and what is due one another, in the marriage relationship, regarding keeping the bed

undefiled. It is suggested that the reader consult the notes on 1 Corinthians by W. Kelly, for other matters in the chapter.

Chapter 5: Purity of Marriage in Spite of Polygamy

The Case of the Gospel Coming to a Polygamous Society and Saving a Polygamist

We are not going to consider the case of a person in a country where polygamy is against the law. Rather, we will consider a matter like the following: many years ago in a now defunct Christian magazine called *Eternity*, I read a long letter printed in it, from a Christian visitor to missionaries in Africa, where polygamy was practiced. Chief X had been saved, but he had ten wives. The visitor wrote that he was at a table eating with a number of missionaries and Chief X's case came under discussion. He was not going to be received to "the communion service" because of having more than one wife. One of the missionaries said that Chief X had given one wife to his brother and now he had nine. The visitors said that the other missionaries were glad to hear of this progress; but he himself was quite saddened about this. He wrote in his letter that he did not think that doing such a thing was the answer, but he did not know what should be done.

Well, being a young man at the time, I had not thought about something like this, and when I read that letter I was highly disturbed at the awfulness of Chief X having to eventually send off nine wives (and children) if he ever expected to partake of "the communion service." It would be better if Chief X maintained his household and gave up "the communion service." But there is a much better answer; and it also turns out to be helpful in considering the subject of divorce and remarriage. I found help from William Kelly's exposition of *1 Timothy*. Here is what he wrote concerning that an elder must be husband of one wife:

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. He must have a good report, and be morally irreproachable in himself and his household. There might be trial or sorrow, -- few families were without both; but what is spoken of here is something that damaged the public repute of the assembly. For this very reason the grand point for local oversight was moral weight. It was not only the ability to inform, counsel, or rebuke, but in order to do all this efficiently a certain godly influence proved at home and abroad. In the practical difficulties with which an elder or bishop would be called to interfere continually in an assembly, there should never be room for those whose conduct might be in question to point to flaws in his own home, or in his own open life and spirit. Thus wisely and holily did the Spirit demand that he should be a person of good report himself, that neither past ways nor present habits should in the least degree compromise the office; and again, with a stainless reputation as well as a man of some spiritual experience in his family -- "one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil." These things would not apply to a man's ministry in the word. A Christian may begin to preach almost as soon as he believed the word of truth, the gospel of salvation; but for one to be clothed with a public and responsible place as elder in an assembly is another thing altogether.²

The wives are not to be dismissed and the saved polygamist must not be an elder or deacon. He is received, and he may be gifted in the preaching of the Word, which is to be acknowledged -- but he is debarred from eldership.

We may learn more from this. Salvation did not change the status of his marriage. He is living in polygamy still.

² *Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Epistles of Paul the Apostle*, London: Broom, p. 380, (1869).

Moreover, in God's governmental ways there subsists a consequence *after salvation* on account of his marital status. *The application of the blood of Christ to him did not change the marital status.* Salvation did not remove everything. He is debarred from oversight in the assembly on account of his marital status. The application of the blood to him does not prevent this. This may shock you if you are used to hearing that the blood takes care of everything. Yes, it does take care of sin judicially, concerning guilt, before God's throne. But there is the matter of His governmental ways and dealings, a subject about which, alas, the Lord's people seem to not hear much, if anything. No amount of repentance by the saved polygamist for the polygamy, will change any of this.

I suggest all this will be of help when considering the subject of unscriptural divorce and remarriage. Polygamy does not set forth the truth of Christ and the church in marriage. Yet, as we see, the polygamy does not warrant refusal at the Lord's table. It does not rise to the offense of unscriptural divorce and remarriage. The case being described is not looked upon as fornication or adultery, though the polygamist status continues. Yet, it does not meet God's mind concerning Christ and the church, and there is a consequence for him as a Christian.

Moreover, he was a polygamist before salvation and had not heard about God's mind for *now*, expressed by the Lord and by Paul -- i.e., one man and one woman. He is not excused on that account, but must bear the governmental consequence in the assembly. Weigh that well. Pre-salvation ignorance of God's Word is not a ground for saying that the blood takes care of everything, and so he may be an elder, if qualified. There may be something pre-salvation, or post-salvation, that is worse than this case of polygamy and the consequence of it.

Note well, then, that his marital status continues to subsist as polygamy. Repentance does not change it, nor does repentance change the consequence of it.

Besides that, if wives died, leaving the saved polygamist with one wife, *then* he would be husband of one wife. But that must be left in God's hands; and, meanwhile, in his heart the saved polygamist needs to bow to what God said; and he needs to love, and nourish, and cherish, his wives, as Christ does the assembly.

Chapter 6: Purity of Remarriage by an Exception

The Lord's Exception Rule in Matthew Concerning Divorce and Remarriage

The Full Mind of God Brought Out -- in Conformity with the Created Relationship

But he answering said [to them], Have ye not read that he who made [them], from the beginning made them male and female, and said, On account of this a man shall leave father and mother and shall be united to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh; so that they are no longer two, but one flesh? What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. They say to him, Why then did Moses command to give a letter of divorce and to send [her] away? He says to them, Moses, in view of the hardheartedness, allowed you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not thus (Matt. 19:4-8; see also Mark 10).

Marriage was instituted by God for the first man and woman (Gen. 2:24). Though it is a type of Christ and the church, it is a type drawn from something of the natural order. It is a "one flesh" union, and therefore can be severed by death. A married man and woman are not "one spirit" however well, and desirable, it is to be of one mind in the Lord. We are one Spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:27) and that is an unbreakable, eternal bond. Marriage, then, is an institution of the natural order and there will be no marriage in heaven (Matt. 22:30). It is something for man in his present state. And God's thought about marriage may be seen in Eden -- one man and one woman.

We sometimes hear, "Marriages are made in heaven." While it is true that *marriage is a divinely ordered relationship in the natural order*, I doubt that the phrase was intended to say that, else why not say it that way? That Christians should seek God's mind in a marriage is true (as they should seek it *in everything*). Is that what the statement means? I doubt it. It is a "romantic" statement that appears to me to obfuscate clear understanding of God's mind about marriage. The same applies to the notion many have that a marriage ceremony conducted by a Christian (or, some religious official) is more holy than if conducted by a non-Christian. It is a thought contrary to God's Word. It is another obfuscating notion. Moreover, it may be that if a Christian officiates, he

has to do so “by the power of the state invested in me, I pronounce you man and wife.” The power of the state invested in a Christian? Where is the call of God to such a thing found in His Word, for a Christian? Think of a Christian mixing a legal requirement of this world with a “religious” ceremony!

On the other hand, we are to be subject to the powers that be (Rom. 13), and the marriage by one invested with the authority of the state is rightly recorded in the proper magistrate’s office.³ There was none of this in Eden; and, the Lord in commenting on this, said:

... so that they are no longer two, but one flesh? What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate⁴ (Matt. 19:6).

When a marriage takes place, Scripture views it as God doing the joining, not the state -- whether for Christians or non-Christians. It has to do with the natural sphere. With regard to governmental ordinances concerning marriage, we follow them, realizing it is God who has joined the pair.

There are differences in cultures regarding arranged marriages and non-arranged marriages. In all cases, God’s Word is the standard -- from no ceremony to a legal ceremony by a governmental authority. Marriage is

³ Legal authority is meant for the restraint of evil and the praise of those that do well (Rom. 13), whatever the gross and grievous failure of governmental authority is. It is well that there be governmental restraint, for men’s hearts are hard as they were in Moses’ day, more fully manifested by the rejection of Christ. Alas, the restraint is ever diminishing and lust is given free reign. The law, then, grants legal rights to the married, can change them, remove them, and even declare two of the same sex to be a married pair. These things are not the standard for a Christian, though the Christian should comply with the law when it does not conflict with the Higher Authority. The Christian is always to *obey* the magistrate as having power from God, and if the magistrate demands sinning against God, we are to *obey* God (Acts 5:29), said Peter, who also wrote 1 Pet. 2:13.

⁴ “Let not man separate” means that divorce is not to occur by “man.” That may take the form of man acting through laws to allow divorces for other causes than fornication. However, the sin of fornication, when married, is “man” acting in a way to cause separation in the marriage. A spouse is forbidden to do such a thing, but if done, it is a cause (the only one) for a scripturally allowed divorce given by the Lord (Matt. 5:32; 19:9).

to be looked upon as God joining the two, according to the original natural order. When looked upon merely as something man has joined together, man presumes to dis-join, i.e., to separate -- and for many causes, including "incompatibility of temperament." Below, we shall consider the one exception (for fornication) for a scriptural divorce and remarriage in Matthew. Where a divorce is on this basis, it is scriptural, and with the Lord's sanction, i.e., God's sanction, yet it was man's sin that underlay this.

Though abuse has come in, God's mind may thus be apprehended from the case of the first man and woman. Yet, when the law of Moses was given, because of the hardness of men's hearts, the law allowed for things in connection with marriage that the Lord Jesus Christ, by His authority, changed. We read, "the law made nothing perfect (Heb. 7:19). The law hardly unfolded the mind and purpose of God, that unfolding being connected with the manifestation of the Father, in the Son, by the Spirit, and the consequent revealing of the purpose of God, in Christ. Yet, in the closing book of the OT canon of Scripture, God declared this:

Take heed then to your spirit, and let none of you deal unfaithfully against the wife of thy youth, (for I hate putting away, saith Jehovah the God of Israel) . . . (Mal. 2:16).

This is His last word on the matter in the closing book of the OT canon of Scripture, and how does the NT open? Yes, the first book of the NT sweeps away the Mosaic allowance⁵ and introduces a new order by Jehovah come here in holy manhood.

In setting aside what the law of Moses allowed regarding divorce for various reasons, the Lord maintained, of course, that marriage was of the natural order. In Matthew and Mark He pronounces the re-establishment of the original, natural order, He points to what transpired in Eden. The re-established order He introduced in setting aside the permissiveness of the law (because of the hardness of their hearts) was truly in accordance with the marriage of the one man and the one woman in Eden. Marriage was meant to be for life, though the Lord allowed that that might be rightly terminated by divorce for the cause of fornication (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). Fornication attacks the marriage bond.

⁵ Western societies now have laws that are of the same character as the divorce for many causes under the law of Moses -- because of the hardness of men's hearts.

W. Kelly wrote:

This chapter {Matt. 19}, then, surveys the relationships of nature in the light of the kingdom. The first and most fundamental is that of marriage.

The Pharisees also came unto Him, tempting Him, and saying unto Him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? (ver. 3).

There you have the conduct of such as are on legal ground. There is really no respect for God, no genuine regard for His law. The Lord at once vindicates from Scripture the institution and the sanctity of marriage:

Have ye not read that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female? (ver. 4).

That is, He shows it is not a mere question of what came in by the law, but He goes to the sources. God had first established it; and, far from dissolving the tie as men list {as they will}, He made a single pair, and therefore only to be the one for the other. All other relationships were light in comparison of this closest tie -- even union.

For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave unto his wife; and the twain shall be one flesh.

Next to the relationship of marriage is the tie of a child to its parents. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of marriage as a natural institution. Who would talk of a child leaving his father and mother for any cause? The Pharisees even would not think of such a thing. The conclusion is irresistible:

What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

They were ready with an answer:

Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? (ver. 7).

There was really no such command: a divorce was simply allowed.

. . . The law might be perfect for its own object, but it perfected nothing, nor was it ever the intention of God that it should. But more than this -- there were certain concessions contained in the law which did not at all express the divine mind; for God therein was dealing with a people after the flesh. The law does not

contemplate a man as born of God; Christianity does. Men of faith during the law 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; hence 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, committeth adultery. And whosoever marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery (verses 8, 9).

Our Lord adds here 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; 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; and the putting away merely proclaims before man what has already taken place in God's sight. All is made perfectly clear. The righteousness of the law is established as far as it went, but it stops short of perfection by admitting in certain cases a less evil to avoid a greater. Our Lord supplies 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.⁶

The Lord's Re-establishment of Divine Order is for All Men Everywhere

What transpired in Eden was at the very initiation of the natural order for man and was meant for all mankind. Unbelievers are not excused. Man has departed from that order. Why?

Because, knowing God, they glorified [him] not as God, neither were thankful; but fell into folly in their thoughts, and their heart without understanding was darkened (Rom. 1:21):

⁶ *Lectures on the Gospel of Matthew*, London: Rouse, pp. 407-408 (1896).

The Mosaic system was a feature of the trial of the first man, man viewed in responsible, Adamic standing, to see if he was recoverable -- which he was not. In that form of the trial of the first man, in the persons of the favored Jews, the law allowed various causes for a man to divorce his wife -- allowed because of the hardness of hearts. The Lord cancelled the allowance made under the law of Moses. The Lord's re-establishment of the original order was in view of the trial of the first man about to be concluded (by the rejection of the Father and the Son, John 15:24). The re-establishment of the marriage relationship upon the natural, created order regarding the first man and woman cannot be a re-establishment for only some men and women. The re-established order is not only for Jews, it is not the order only for Christians, it is the order for all whose origin is from the original pair in Eden.

An argument that all men have not heard the Scriptures about this, and therefore the re-establishment of the original order by the Lord is not applicable to all, is not valid. Such a way of thinking would, for example, excuse those who never heard Acts 17:30:

God . . . now enjoins men that they shall all everywhere repent . . .

The General Rule: God's Thought about Marriage Is That it Should Continue until Death

And so it is stated in a general manner in the NT that divorce leads to adultery. Let us read the references in the Synoptic gospels:

But *I* say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, except for cause of fornication, makes her commit adultery, and whosoever marries one that is put away *commits 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; and he who marries one put away *commits adultery* (Matt. 19:9).

Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another, commits adultery against her. And if a woman put away her husband and shall marry another, she *commits adultery* (Mark 10:11, 12).

Every one who puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery; and everyone that marries one put away from a husband *commits adultery* (Luke 16:18).

We see from this that if a man or a woman puts away the spouse and marries another, such *commit adultery* (Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18). If a man puts away his wife, he makes her commit adultery (Matt. 5:32). And if a person marries one who has been put away, such

commit adultery⁷ (Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Luke 16:18). Matt. 5:32 and 19:9 state an exception to this general rule in the case of a divorce and remarriage on the basis of the spouse's fornication. The one offended against is permitted to remarry, while the offender is not.

From Mark 10:12 we see that our Lord gives a new status to the woman than under the law of Moses -- which did not make provision for a woman to divorce her husband. This new status is seen by connecting the exception clause to a woman whose husband fornicates; for the exception clause allows the spouse offended against by fornication on the part of the other to divorce and remarry without the charge of committing adultery being applied to the spouse offended against.

The Differences in the Gospel Accounts

There is no contradiction among the three Gospels. It often occurs that there is a difference in wording when the same event is noted in the Gospels. This has to do with the purpose of the Spirit of God regarding the themes and characters of the several Gospels, and the way the Lord is presented.

WHY IS THE EXCEPTION ONLY FOUND IN MATTHEW?

That there is a Jewish audience in view in the gospel of Matthew is accepted by many, but numerous conclusions drawn from that thought

⁷ The italicized words in Matt. 5:32; 19:9; and Mark 10:12 translate *μοιχάται*. Referring to Matt. 5:32, we are told by Spiros Zodhiates this meaning:

Moichatai, third person singular present indicative of *moichaomai* meaning "commits adultery the rest of the life" (*What About Divorce*, Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, p. 71, 1984).

Well, not exactly, because death may remove one spouse. But the thought concerning the continuing status of the marriage as adulterous is correct, as the present tense indicates, and we shall also see that Rom. 7:2, 3 also shows that there is such a thing as an on-going status of adultery.

"Commits adultery" in Luke 16:18 is *μοιχεύει* "*Moicheuei*, third person singular active indicative present" (ibid.).

In his more recent book, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, Dr. Zodhiatus does not mention the ongoing status, and I do not know if he has changed his mind about the thrust of the present tense. Be that as it may, an on-going status is indicated in these Scriptures. The fact that many Christians find that unpalatable and argue against it, does not change what we do not like to hear.

need to be rejected. For example, it is explained by some expositors that Matthew uses the expression “kingdom of the heavens” instead of “kingdom of God” because of Jewish reverence for the name of God.⁸ But that does not account for why five times in Matthew the expression “kingdom of God” appears. The getting rid of the exception clause in Matt. 19:9 as applying to Christians, by making it something Jewish concerning discovery of pre-nuptial sin in the betrothed one, is also an invalid idea. The father of the idea seems to be the notion that no divorce and remarriage is permissible under any circumstances; or, if divorce is allowable, no remarriage under any circumstances. The *pre-nuptial sin view* may result from an idea that this is the only way to harmonize Matthew with Mark and Luke. It has been observed that the pre-nuptial sin explanation makes the pre-nuptial sin worse than the attack against the marriage bed.

The reason that the exception clause is only found in Matthew is the same reason why the church is mentioned only in Matthew, and why the phrase “kingdom of the heavens” is used only in Matthew. How is it that the church is mentioned only in the gospel having a Jewish audience especially in view? Some “Jewish gospel” explanations of various matters are wrong. There is *much more* to the characteristics of Matthew’s gospel than that it has a Jewish audience in view. However, it is well for these things to be especially directed to a Jewish audience for their instruction, as well as for our instruction.

Matthew indeed presents Christ as Messiah-Immanuel, the King of Israel sent to the Jews to be received of them -- beginning with the Messianic descent traced (Matt. 1). His rejection is very marked in Matt. 12, the emissaries of Jerusalem charging that He wrought by Beelzebub, thus committing the sin against the Holy Spirit by Whose power He wrought. This rejection is marked also by the introduction of the subject of the kingdom in a mystery aspect, consequent upon His rejection. The kingdom in power is postponed and meanwhile there is established a mystery form of the kingdom. Peculiar to Matthew is the designation of “the kingdom of the heavens,” meaning, the rule of the heavens.

Matt. 13 gives a collection of extensive features of the kingdom of the heavens in mystery, as earlier “the sermon on the mount” brought together a series of features (Matt. 5-7) suitable to those desiring to enter

⁸ It reminds me of Messianic Jews spelling God as G-d, while they are busy Judaizing. Meanwhile, the Christian, having the Spirit of Sonship, cries “Abba Father” even as the Lord Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36).

the kingdom of the heavens (in power). Matthew brings things together in a 'dispensational order' (Luke has a moral order, and Mark's is markedly chronological order, befitting the presentation of Christ as the perfect Servant-Son).

The presented King was rejected and the manifested rule of the heavens which had been preached by John and by the Lord up to this point, was postponed, and during His absence there is established a sphere of profession called the kingdom of the heavens -- Christendom. Moreover, Christ was to have an assembly (Matt. 16, 18) during His absence. In that assembly, His discipline would be carried out -- now no longer in Israel, now set aside. The assembly would be the seat of God's administration of government, not now in a political or national sphere, but in a moral sphere.

These are among the dispensational changes sharply marked in Matthew. Moreover, Matthew has a governmental character. It is interesting and instructive how this is seen in the parable of the two debtors (Matt. 18:23-35). The forgiveness being removed does *not* refer to *judicial forgiveness* (which is involved in the expiation of sin and its guilt). The parable is *not* about *vital relationship* with God, but about His governmental ways with those professedly in relationship with Him. It is a fact that conduct of those in professed relationship to God brings them under certain consequences which we call governmental consequences from God, as the case with the debtor who had been forgiven much. There was a governmental consequence concerning what he did to the one who owed him something (relatively small).

Consequent upon Christ's rejection, it began to be unfolded that a new order would be introduced. This is very marked in Matthew's gospel. Yes, a Jewish audience may be specially in view. It was incumbent upon them to realize and learn the setting aside of the nation and the introduction of the new order and a new sphere of God's moral government. So, instead of Messiah's kingdom and glory being established, the kingdom in mystery, and the church, were substituted. Of course, that very action on God's part is governmental in character, upon Israel.

We have already noticed that an unscriptural divorce and remarriage brings one under the government of God. There are consequences. Here, the exception is stated that indicates there is not a governmental consequence on the scripturally divorced and remarried, though there is one for the one divorced on the basis of fornication committed.

And speaking of God's governmental dealings in the case of an unscriptural remarriage, we should observe that if repentance comes in,

then the proper course is to bow to, and accept, His hand of government upon the soul, owning it, and waiting upon Him in the self-inflicted status and its consequences -- as illustrated in the case of David's sin, which resulted in the loss of four children during the remainder of his life.

Regarding the suitability of the exception clause being found in Matthew, that brings to mind that, speaking generally, someone once said:

Every Scripture is perfect in its place.

THE ACCOUNT IN MARK

Comparing Matt. 19 and Mark 10, there is this important point to notice. In Matt. 19:3 the words "for every cause" appears, but not so in Mark. In Matthew the question is noted more comprehensively and the answer is more comprehensive -- including the exception clause in v. 9. So in Matthew it has pleased the Spirit of God to have the question include the matter of "every cause" and the Lord's answer that there is only one cause allowed. This finds its place in Matthew because of the governmental character of Matthew, discussed above.

In Mark it is treated simply as a question of the general bearing of marriage (the words "for every cause" being omitted) and the answer given does not address the exception matter.

In Matt. 19, nature is viewed in relation to what is suitable to the kingdom of the heavens. In Mark 10, nature is viewed in relation to service to God. Mark presents the Lord Jesus as perfect Servant. We have in it also the training of His own for service. Hence such notices as leaving all for the gospel's sake (Mark 10:29). The path of service did not exclude the amazement and fright of the disciples (Mark 10:32). And even in the path of following Him in service, His own may express self-occupation as James and John did in Mark 10:35. He Himself was ever perfect. It is remarkable that when the disciples told Him, "all seek thee," instead of seeking crowds, He answered, "Let us go elsewhere into the neighboring towns," etc. (Mark 1:38). Is there a lesson in that?

In the path of service, His servants will face the issue of divorce. The original order must be insisted on, the perfect Servant having re-established the matter on that basis. The matter of the exception, which has its place, as well as the matter of the disciples' response, is not noted here, nor is the matter of one making himself a eunuch for the kingdom's sake.

It is said that Mark has the Grecio-Roman world in view and therefore the bringing out the case of a woman divorcing her husband, for this was

allowed in the Roman world. So be it; the order applies, however, to all, including Jewish women -- and men.

Every Scripture is perfect in its place.

THE STATEMENT IN LUKE

The gospel of Luke presents the Lord Jesus in the perfection of His manhood, hence the tracing Him back to Adam; as well as the incident when He was 12 years old. He is often seen in prayer -- the expression of dependence; etc. He is morally perfect.

Luke brings together incidents in a moral connection, i.e., to bring out a line of moral teaching, not so dispensationally as Matthew, or chronological as in Mark giving us the steps of faithful service carried on "immediately."

In Luke 16:14-18 we see the Pharisees marked as "covetous." They "mocked" the One Whose Word affronted them. Their moral state is exposed. Hence Luke 16:15, peculiar to this gospel, addresses that state of heart. They prided themselves in the law and their knowledge of it. However, a new order was being introduced and one needed to break through all which might hinder appropriation of it (v. 16). Not that the law should fail (v. 17), but man has failed. We know that the law of Moses allowed divorce for many causes (because of the hardness of man's heart), and that hardness and lust would expand even that allowance as far as men thought they could. And in the closing of the OT canon (Malachi) Jehovah had stated that He hated divorce. But self must be served by fallen man. And so this selfishness came out in marriage, marriage which ought to have been a precious thing to a man as given by God. In v. 18 the Lord, the perfect Man, re-establishes the original order. In this instructive, moral flow of heart-exposing truth, God in holy manhood addressed these words to the covetous self-justifiers who engaged in abominations before God. The divorce-remarriage matter, addressed from this standpoint, was what was needed, without the exception clause being included. This is in accordance with the object of this gospel.

Every Scripture is perfect in its place.

The One, and Only, Exception for Valid Divorce

FORNICATION AND ADULTERY

When we considered Heb. 12:4 we observed that both fornication and adultery defile the marriage bed; also, that the word fornication is sometimes used in a very wide sense that would include adultery. There

are Scriptures that speak of both separately, even in Matt. 15:19. However, the word “fornication” in Matt. 19:9 is used in the wide sense, as Heb. 12:4 indicates, where both adultery and fornication attack the marriage bed. There are numerous ideas about what *porneia* means in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9, some strictly equating it with adultery, others saying it refers to incest, some to pre-marital sin, etc.

But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, not for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery.

There are Christians who read the word “fornication” and treat the word as if adultery alone is meant. Substituting the word “adultery” for the word “fornication” in these words of our Lord changes the meaning. The word fornication is used here in a sense that includes adultery, but not adultery exclusively. “Fornication,” here, includes what is comprehended in Heb. 12:4. It includes adultery, sexual acts with the unmarried, homosexual acts, acts of bestiality, and pedophilic acts. According to Scripture, these things are an immoral assault against the integrity of the marriage bond. The spouse offended against in this way is permitted to divorce the guilty person.

Do you think that the Lord was incapable of saying “adultery” instead of “fornication” if He meant adultery exclusively? Nor did he exclude adultery. I am anticipating somewhat here that the exception clause gives permission for the one offended against by an unscriptural divorce and remarriage to remarry. When the offender fornicates, he commits adultery. This adultery results in permission for the one offended against to remarry. Thus, adultery *is* comprehended within the exception clause, but the Lord used a term that reaches beyond adultery only: “fornication.”

PRE-MARITAL SIN IS NOT MEANT

Really, the exception clause in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9 is quite clear. Persons who, perhaps, think that the exception violates the Lord’s words in Mark 10:6-12 and Luke 16:18, yet realize that it does mean an exception, claim that it was something Jewish and relates to the discovery that there had been pre-marital fornication, thus warranting “divorce” — even in the betrothal period. Taking this tack, it can be admitted that there is an exception clause. In effect, this view puts a premium upon pre-marital sin over and above the evil of fornication during actual marriage -- because, in this view no divorce and no remarriage is allowed when the marriage is immorally violated by fornication (including adultery). Personally, I see the *pre-marital sin* explanation as a violation of Heb. 12:4 in this way; marriage is to be held in honor in every way, including violation of

the integrity of the marriage bed as worse than pre-marital fornication.⁹ The *pre-marital sin view* is to be rejected; rejected along with the notion that somehow Matt. 19:9 would be contradictory of what we read in Mark and Luke if Matt. 19:9 says that a marriage may, as a result of fornication by the spouse, be scripturally ended in divorce, with liberty of remarriage of the one offended against.

It is clear that fornication during marriage gives a permitted (not a commanded) scriptural ground to the one offended against to divorce the offender, and remarry.

Let us also note what Matt. 19:9 would say according to the *pre-marital sin view*. Interpreted this way, the verse would read, then,

“Whosoever shall put away his wife (I am not speaking of betrothed wives), and shall marry another, committeth adultery.”¹⁰

THE EXCEPTION

The question put to the Lord was about the validity of there being many causes for divorce:

... Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?
(Matt. 19:3).

The Lord’s answer is that there is only one valid cause:

But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, except for cause of fornication, makes her commit adultery, and whosoever marries one that is put away commits 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; and he who marries one put away commits adultery (Matt. 19:9).

⁹ In Deut. 22:21, pre-marital sin was subject to the death penalty. So was adultery (Deut. 22:22). The law did not make pre-marital sin worse than adultery. The Lord is hardly making pre-marital sin worse than adultery in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9. In John 8:1-11 we do not find the Lord insisting on the death penalty for adultery. He calls it sin, of course. Among Christians, a guilty one must be excommunicated from the assembly. In Jer. 3:8 we see that Jehovah put away Israel for adultery. Adultery is used figuratively, and it is stated as the basis for giving her a bill of divorce.

¹⁰ Whedon on *Matthew, in loco*.

If A divorces B, “not for fornication,” and marries another, A commits adultery.

Clearly, then, if A divorces B because of B’s fornication, and marries another, A does not commit adultery.

Thus, *our Lord permits the remarriage of the one offended against*. The exception clause precludes the guilt of adultery if the spouse obtaining a scriptural divorce remarries.

It may be that repentance and forgiveness come in before a divorce is consummated. There is no command to divorce; it is permitted, and such a divorce is not sinful for the one offended against. If the spouse offended against was carrying on in the household in an ungodly manner, leading up to the marital unfaithfulness of the other spouse (I do not present that as an excuse for fornication) the assembly might have to address that matter. Years ago it was suggested to me that “offended against” was a better way of stating the matter than to say “the innocent one,” because “innocent one” might, but not necessarily, be saying too much about the one offended against.

A REMARRIAGE BY A GUILTY, SCRIPTURALLY DIVORCED PERSON IS ADULTERY

Another thing should be pointed out. If A divorces B because B has committed fornication, then if B (the guilty one) remarries, B commits adultery in that marriage. And so say Mark and Luke.

Assuming that a guilty person is divorced, for such to remarry would be adultery. God does not want the person to so sin. The conclusion is that the guilty, divorced person should remain celibate.

IF NO FORNICATION IS INVOLVED, THERE IS NOT A SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR DIVORCE

Mere desertion (desertion without fornication being involved) is not a basis for divorce. The idea is a violation of our Lord’s authority and direction. That Paul added another basis for divorce is an affront to our Lord’s authority, and divorces on that unscriptural basis are not to be accepted by the faithful. This is discussed in another paper, *Marriage Divorce and Separation*, available from Present Truth Publishers. A. P. Cecil wrote:

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.¹¹

J. R. Gill 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 temperament, etc. -- must, scripturally, remain unmarried UNLESS the husband either before or after the divorce is guilty of fornication.¹²

And W. Kelly tersely said:

To the disciples (in the house, as Mark here tells us) the Lord gives the stringent reply that, "Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another, committeth adultery." Here is the dark converse of sin in this relationship: no license of man can consecrate the annulling of that tie while in the flesh.¹³

In the following quotation from W. Kelly, regarding Matt. 5:32, I have added the bold-faced emphasis:

In connection with the light of heaven on the lusts of the heart, the Lord adds His word on the permission of divorce in Deut. 24. It is here the woman protected against hard-hearted man. **Positive sin in violation of the marriage tie alone calls for divorce.** Men abused the license beyond measure, as if the permission were a precept; and any vexation sufficed. But Jehovah hates putting away, as the last prophet testified to the Jews in their evil day {Mal. 2:16}.

In Chap. 19 of this Gospel the question {was} distinctly proposed to Him by the Pharisees, Is it lawful to put away one's wife for every cause? And He answered and said, Have ye not read that He that made from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be united to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh? So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What

¹¹ In the article, "Marriage," *Collected Writings of A. P. Cecil*, vol. 1, Present Truth Publishers.

¹² *Divorce and Remarriage*, p. 5.

¹³ *An Exposition of the Gospel of Mark*, on Mark 10:12.

therefore God joined together, let not man put asunder. They say to Him, Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorce and to put away? He saith to them, Moses for your hardness of heart allowed you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it hath not been thus. But I say to you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, not for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery, and he that marrieth one put away committeth adultery. His disciples say to Him, If the case of man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. And He said to them, All cannot receive this word, but those to whom it hath been given.

Thus was the mind of God made clear. The indulgence of lust is incompatible with entering the kingdom of the heavens. The law forbade the act of adultery; the Lord condemns even the looking licitiously as adultery committed already in the heart {Mat. 5:28}. He insisted therefore on the most unsparing decision with all that gave occasion. Was it not better to pluck out the right eye or cut off the right hand, rather than the whole body be cast into hell? Here (as in all the chapters of the first Gospel before Matt. 13 where He begins as the Sower), it is not seeking sinners in sovereign grace, but saints, as He enjoins on the twelve in chap. 10. "Into whatsoever city or village ye enter, inquire who in it is worthy" (ver. 11). So the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5) describes what spiritual characters suit the kingdom, as the end (Matt. 7) declares that none shall enter but he that does the will of His Father that is in the heavens. Not even prophesying or miraculous powers, were it casting out demons through the Lord's name, could be a passport to the workers of lawlessness. Practical obedience of His words alone should stand. The rock here is spiritual reality. His word was incomparably more withering to self-righteousness than the law of Moses.

There is power of God given exceptionally to be above marriage, and live only to Christ here below. But, to far the most, marriage is God's order for man on earth. And the monkish rule with high pretension leads into horrible evasion, hypocrisy, and corruption even contrary to nature and abominable. **God's mind is clear from the first; adultery alone justifies divorce.**

Hence the necessity would be felt urgently and absolutely of receiving a new nature and an everlasting redemption in the Savior. No interpretation of our Lord's words here or elsewhere is more radically false than that He puts believers under the law

as their rule of life. He is really condemning unbelievers and hypocrites far more stringently than the law did, and those sayings of the elders which took advantage of a legal permission for carnal indulgence and unfairness to a wife who through any cause became less attractive to her selfish husband. Such souls were inadmissible to the kingdom. Only the godly remnant are here contemplated, who abhor corruption as they do violence. The presence of Christ, not of the law given by Moses, was the suited moment for defining the character and conduct proper to the new thing He would set up. He was the standard of what pleased God, and must mark those who are His. "The law made nothing perfect" was a hard lesson for Jews; it seems quite as hard for those who inherit the traditions of fallen Christendom, and not less for Protestants than Papists.

To be content with being nobody in the world, and despised by its religion, is impossible to human nature; to be mourners as Christ was, feeling for God's will and majesty where lawlessness pervades; to be meek now, waiting for the glorious inheritance in God's time, instead of clamorous for our rights; to hunger and thirst after (not ease or wealth, or power or honor, but) righteousness, cannot be without partaking of a divine nature. Harder still was the actively gracious spirit of mercifulness, purity in heart, and peace-making according to God, with the persecutions which such righteousness entails, and especially such maintenance of Christ's name as effaces ours.

Our Lord accordingly singles out of the Decalogue the two great prohibitions of murder on the one hand and of adultery on the other. Assuredly He came not to make void the law or the prophets, but to give their fulness. He not only went farther than either, but declared that a righteousness surpassing that of the Scribes and Pharisees was indispensable for entering the kingdom of the heavens. He most pointedly sets His word with divine authority, so as to contrast what He laid down far beyond the claims of the law. In the case before us, as looking lustfully convicts of adultery before God, so whosoever put away his wife, save for cause of fornication, made her commit adultery, as well as him who married her. Thus He established a moral basis, not for a nation of mixed character, but fit for God's family and kingdom, which judged the heart's evil and allowed no concession to hard-heartedness. And what can be plainer than on this later occasion (Matt. 19) His going up to the beginning, long

before the law, to God's instituted order and word in Gen. 2?
There again His own word is full and final authority. . .

In another paper, *Marriage, Divorce and Separation*,¹⁴ there is a collection of the statements of brethren affirming that there is but one basis for divorce. I extract only several by J. N. Darby, who, of course, held that there was but one ground for divorce, though some of his statements have been twisted to support the notion that mere desertion warrants divorce (a notion fully dealt with in that paper). Here is JND, speaking about one basis only, as clearly as could be desired:

. . . 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.¹⁵

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.¹⁶

To this I add the following from Frank Gill:

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.¹⁷

¹⁴ Available from Present Truth Publishers. This paper shows that J. N. Darby and others all held that there was only one basis for scriptural divorce, and shows that mere desertion (desertion not involving fornication) is not a scriptural basis for scriptural divorce and remarriage. The words, "not bound," in 1 Cor. 7:15 are explained in the paper.

¹⁵ *Synopsis* on Matt. 19.

¹⁶ "Notes on the Gospel of Matthew" (ch. 19), *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, vol. 30.

¹⁷ Letter of May 28, 1932 supporting a no divorce, no remarriage position, signed by William Stradling and Hugh Dickson, quoting from a letter by Frank Gill (son of Alfred Gill). Emphasis is in the quotation.

In a letter dated Nov. 21, 1979, Adrian Roach wrote:

A man or a 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 “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.

These statements are consonant with the Lord having re-established this issue in accordance with the created order. Below, Rom. 7:2,3 will also be brought to bear on this, showing confirmation of what has been stated above.

The Continuing Status of an Unscriptural Remarriage

ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE, THERE IS SUCH A THING AS AN ADULTEROUS MARITAL STATUS

The fact that the words “commits adultery” is in the present tense points to what is an on-going status of the unscriptural remarriage: it is adulterous in on-going status. It is remarkable that numbers of modern, evangelical, exegetical works on the Gospels seem to me to avoid dealing with this matter.¹⁸ There are, of course, books that mention this, and seek for ways to avoid the idea of such an on-going status. Some have expressed themselves that if such was actually the case, then upon repentance such a remarriage would have to end, and therefore they seek to thwart the force of the present tense as indicating an on-going status of the remarriage. And, there are others who acknowledge that the present tense does mean that there is such an on-going status, and do also hold that upon repentance, such a remarriage must be dissolved.

¹⁸ D. A. Carson, in “Matthew,” in vol. 8 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, summarizes various views, saying that there are four problems contributing to difficulty in understanding Matt. 19:9. The first is textual. He accepts the exception clause. The second regards *porneia*, and after surveying opinions, he concludes for a wider meaning than adultery alone. The third and fourth difficulties regard why Matthew alone has the exception clause, and what does it mean. He wrote: “Proposed solutions are legion; but there are seven important ones” (p. 414). Such is the state of affairs. Interestingly, no fifth item is noted; namely, the present tense of “commits adultery.”

This matter requires patient inquiry into the mind of God concerning *His governmental ways*, which is something generally omitted in the discussion, likely because of persons not being instructed from Scripture in this line of truth.¹⁹

In the face, then, of the present tense of “commits adultery,” if one does not want such a teaching, he can easily find teachers that will work around the force of this. There are, of course, writers that assert that there is no such thing as an on-going remarriage status of adultery. The word “punctiliar” is applied to the case by some who refuse to acknowledge an on-going adulterous status, meaning that the adultery committed by the offender in remarrying is only a one-time act of adultery.²⁰ Then, if repentance occurs, such a person may be received to the Lord’s table. *Keep in mind that such a view, in effect, validates the remarriage as having become a scriptural remarriage after the first sexual act!* The result is, then, that repentance for having done this clears all away; and, indeed, the person is in a better position than the saved polygamist we considered above. But it is not true.

The reason that the unscriptural remarriage is on-going adultery is not because the offender is *still bonded*, or tied, to the first spouse. In John 4:17, 18 we read:

The woman answered and said, I have not a husband. Jesus says to her, Thou hast well said, I have not a husband; for thou hast had five husbands, and he whom now thou hast is not thy husband: this thou hast spoken truly.

“Hast had” does not mean “have” five husbands. The Lord recognizes the fact that there were not five subsisting ties, or bonds, to five men. He recognizes the dissolution of the bond. So, there is another reason that God considers the unscripturally divorced and remarried as in adultery.

HELP FROM ROM. 7:2, 3

Besides the present tense in Matt. 19:9 (and 5:32, as well as in Mark and in Luke), while Rom. 7:1-4 is not about the subject of divorce and remarriage, and an exception clause, we nonetheless obtain some help from this passage. We rightly expect that the Apostle’s teaching would not contradict what our Lord taught when he used something from

¹⁹ This is the case also regarding another truth of Scripture, namely, that Scripture characterizes an act by its tendency, which is a great help in understanding this subject.

²⁰ (Refer to Footnote #7 and Appendix.)

marriage to illustrate that the Christian has been made dead to the law (not that the law has died -- it has not!) leaving the Christian in a state “to be to another,” Christ (Rom. 7:4). His teaching is altogether consonant with the Lord’s re-established order of God in creation. Let us bring to bear the illustration of the woman’s case used by the Apostle as showing that there indeed is such a thing as an on-going, adulterous status to a marriage. The Apostle was not illustrating by using a figment of the imagination, but by something that exists. Rom. 7:2, 3 says:

For the married woman is bound by the law to her husband so long as he is alive; but if the husband should die, she is clear from the law of the husband: so then, the husband being alive, she shall be called an adulteress if she be to another man; but if the husband should die, she is free from the law, so as not to be an adulteress, though she be to another man.

So while the husband lives, “she shall be called an adulteress if she be to another man.” This is an on-going thing; “she shall be called an adulteress,” not for one act, and then she is no more an adulteress. Not one act, and then she is clear of the law of her husband. She subsists in that status of not being clear of the law of the first spouse *as long as the former spouse is alive* (Rom. 7:3). Thus, **it is clear that the one-time adultery (punctiliar action) notion is false.**

Moreover, we have another help to our understanding here. The adulterous state no longer subsists *after* the first husband dies.

This passage is of great help to us regarding the matter of divorce and remarriage.

It may be well to add here that:

(1) according to Matt. 19:9, a husband in such a case is free to remarry. Therefore he cannot be considered as then having two wives -- as if the first wife was still actually a wife.

(2) Yet, even though that bond to the first wife no longer exists (thus allowing him to remarry) God has bound on the woman the law of that first husband so long as he lives. She abides in that status.

We should also observe the similarity of one point regarding the case of the on-going adulterous status and the case of the saved polygamist discussed above. If the Lord removed the husband by death, the woman would be free of the law of the husband and the status of the marriage changes. If the Lord removes a wife (or wives) from the saved polygamist by death, so that he was the husband of one wife, the status of the marriage is changed. This is in the hands of God; and meanwhile

there needs to be a bowing to God and owning His governmental hand upon the on-going status, seeking grace to bow to His holy will concerning the results of what one has done.

THE END OF THE ADULTEROUS MARRIAGE

An adulterous marriage is ended by the death of one of the guilty parties. (That does not, however, clear everything, but that is an additional topic.) In the case of what is stated in Rom. 7:2, 3, we see that the principle is that the woman would not be called an adulteress after the spouse offended against has died.

In an assembly of Christians where I was as a teenager, there was a couple that always attended the Lord's day morning meeting but never partook of the loaf. Upon inquiry about this, I was told that it was an unscriptural marriage, and though repentance had come in, they were not to be received.

Many years later, both Adrian Roach and Larry Newton told me about such a case in NY state, where there was repentance, but they were refused reception to the Lord's table, but they came to the meetings for a period of years. Then, a former spouse died, and then reception took place. I see this as in accord with what we have been considering from Scripture.

NO BREAKING UP OF THE GUILTY REMARRIAGE

The answer to the adulterous marriage state was not to break up the household -- possibly with children. There is such a thing as repentant persons bowing to the government of God which is on them, as David did. Remarkably, he had pronounced his own sentence of judgment and had to live to see four of his children given in death for the evil he did regarding faithful Urijah and also Bathsheba. He carried this burden for the rest of his life, and finally, when on his death-bed, came the revolt of Adonijah, the last of the four. Recall, also the circumstances of the converted polygamist (see above), whose marriage remained polygamous, and who bore its consequences.

An instructive passage concerning a governmental consequence, and rebelling against it, is given in Num. 14. When the evil report of the land of promise was given by the 10 spies, the consequence was that Israel would remain in the wilderness for 40 years, and also a plague killed the 10 spies. The people rebelled and said they would go up to the land. They received further chastening for their audacity. Their place was to bow to the situation they had brought on themselves, without taking some action to change it. They had wanted to get out from under the

governmental consequence of their rebellion against Jehovah. They wanted to undo the sentence of judgment. But the result was that all 20 years and older that came out of Egypt (except Caleb and Joshua) did not enter the land. These are among the weighty examples of God's governmental ways. The lesson is this: repent, bow to God's government upon you, and seek to walk with Him.

It need hardly be said that those in an unscriptural remarriage, even though repentant, should not be at the Lord's table, unless God steps in in some way to change the matter. The offender is bound by the law of the one offended against as long as the one offended against lives (Rom. 7:2, 3). And this is not because the one offended against is still in a 'bond' with the offender. The one offended against by an unscriptural marriage, along with fornication being involved, is free to remarry -- which would not be the case if still "tied" to such an offender. It is the offender that has this consequence placed upon him by the Word of our God. The death of one of the two in an unscriptural remarriage does not warrant another remarriage as long as the first spouse lives (Rom. 7:2, 3). Fornication in marriage is quite wicked. It is an assault on the truth of Christ and the church as well as an evil against the spouse and an evil against any children by that marriage. May our marriages portray Christ and the assembly!

What Does 'Causes the Other to Commit Adultery' Mean?

SCRIPTURE CHARACTERIZES AN ACT BY ITS TENDENCY

Implicit in this question is the realization that the divorced spouse may not actually commit adultery. That is true; why then the statement about causing the other one to commit adultery? It is because unscriptural divorce has that tendency; and as W. Kelly brings out in his notes on 1 Cor. 8:7-13, "*Scripture characterizes an act by its tendency*," a principle quite helpful in the present discussion. Here is what he said:

But conscientious men are apt to be slow in apprehension, often much more so than those who are less exercised. For them the apostle would have us feel. Howbeit knowledge, or that knowledge, is not in all: but some, with conscience of the idol until now, eat as of a thing sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. They were not at all assured of the nonentity of these false gods . . . Doubting thus, they were condemned when they ate; and Satan thus took advantage of them through guilty fears. The apostle admits that food will not commend us to God. Those who pleaded their title should see

that its exercise did not stumble the weak. What if the weak one imitated it with a conscience not free and emboldened or edified the wrong way, and the brother for whom Christ died perished? For scripture characterizes an act according to its tendency, without palliating it by the resources of grace in arresting the issue. To sin thus against the brethren, to wound their weak conscience, is to sin against Christ. The apostle closes this part of his subject by a fervid declaration of his refusal of a thing otherwise open to him, if it were the occasion of stumbling to his brother. Such is love according to Christ.

Of course, in this case grace would keep the brother from the ultimate result of such disregard on the part of others, but the true character of the act is exposed.

HOW DOES THIS PRINCIPLE APPLY TO THE ONE OFFENDED AGAINST?

The spouse unscripturally divorced by the other is not free to remarry until, and unless, the offender commits fornication (adultery, homosexual act, act of bestiality, pedophilic act), thereby breaking the bond. See Matt. 5:32. If the man puts away his wife, not on the basis of fornication, he causes her to commit adultery. She may not, in fact, do it. But the man is charged with the tendency of his act, which tendency is for her to do so. If the man marries another, he then is guilty of fornication, which sets her free, but does not remove his guilt.

Let us suppose a woman divorces her husband and marries another. That divorced husband is *then* free to marry. That divorced husband is not bound by the law of the wife, so to speak; yet the offending woman is, in God's sight, bound by the law of the husband she offended against. The one offended against is not regarded as tied, or bonded, to the offender in an actual bond. And if not in a bond with the offender, the offender is not in a bond with the one offended against. The idea that a 'tie' necessarily subsists is not the point, besides being incorrect. The bond has been broken by the offender; but the point is that God regards the offender as bound to the law of the other, even though the "tie" is broken. It is a question of God stating what the case is as a consequence of the sin.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO THE GUILTY ONE?

We have already noted from Matt. 5:32 that the man divorcing his wife, not on the basis of fornication, makes her commit adultery (i.e., that is the tendency of the act). He is guilty of this. (Possibly, if he does not fornicate, and repents, it might result in a return to the spouse.)

So Scripture says, “makes her commit adultery” because Scripture characterizes an act by its tendency. The tendency of the act of the offender who unscripturally divorces the spouse is to push the one divorced into adultery; and God accounts this sin to the one who did the divorcing.

Unscriptural Divorce and Remarriage Is a Much Worse Case than the Polygamous Case Discussed Above

Why does that even have to be pointed out? Certainly, the consequence of violating Matt. 19:9 is much greater than in the case of polygamy described above. But the idea that only the first act in a remarriage is in violation of Matt. 19:9 makes it out to be less, so that if the person who violates Matt. 19:9 repents, he is cleared; he may then be received; perhaps he may even become an overseer in the very same assembly where the saved polygamist (described above) is, who is debarred from exercising oversight. On the other hand, where the force of the present tense in Matt. 19:9 is acted on by an assembly, such a situation would be prevented from occurring.

The greater departure from the Word regarding marriage includes the sanctions regarding the lesser, and of course, much more.

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 (A. P. Cecil).

To do otherwise is to consecrate the unconsecratable:

. . . no license of man can consecrate the annulling that tie while in the flesh (William Kelly, *An Exposition of the Gospel of Mark, in loco*, re Mark 10:1-12).

The unscriptural divorce is not to be owned, and thus certainly neither a marriage founded on it. But it seems that some people have the notion that the remarriage that results from an unscriptural divorce (which must not be owned) may be owned by the assembly, if the man repents of what he did, and so he is cleared. But it was not initiated as a marriage in accordance with Scripture; what turns it into a marriage in accordance with Scripture? The claim that repentance does it is without Scripture support and is unholiness.

The character of the remarriage is determined by the starting point (as in the case of the polygamist above) and is not to be recognized by the assembly as scriptural, because the starting point is an expressly forbidden divorce and unscriptural remarriage. Does the fact that the unscripturally divorced person remarries and then repents force God to

have to now recognize the divorce as sanctioned by Him? No, the character of the divorce never changes, and he has now gotten himself into a situation that subsists, and the offender's repentance does not change that. While the point of departure is the point of recovery is a general scriptural principle, there are some circumstances that we may get ourselves into from which we cannot be extricated, except by some act of God, even though the departure from God in the soul may be recovered.

Another point; let us say that a person obtains an unscriptural divorce. He is not free to marry another. Suppose before he marries another, he repents of the divorce. He is forgiven by God. Does that forgiveness necessarily remove governmental consequences? Does therefore that now permit him to marry someone? Do you see where the refusal of the force of the present tense in Matt. 19:9 leads? Refusal of the force of the present tense opens the way to further self-will, only now covered by an aura that the expression of that will is sanctioned by God.

CONCLUSION: SOLVING ALL DIFFICULTIES.

There are many ramifications to such a sinful course as we are considering. We do not have to solve them all, we do not have to satisfy everyone's objections, to have the mind of God about the on-going character -- that there is such a thing as a continuing status of marriage with which the Lord's table must not be identified.

In speaking my characterization of a remarriage in violation of Matt. 19:9, I am open to a better way of describing it than I have done, provided that its character as a subsisting, continuous violation of Matt. 19:9 be maintained, in keeping with what has been reviewed above.

Appendix

As an example of rejecting the thrust of the present tense, the reader may observe what Craig S. Keener wrote:

If we adopt the reading of Matthew 19:9 {of those} who oppose *all* remarriage following divorce as adultery, we must advocate breaking up all marriages subsequent to the first.

Although the present-tense verb of 19:9 need not imply that an invalid remarriage involves continuous adultery during the entire period of cohabitation, this is the only way to take it if we rely on an extremely literal interpretation of the grammar . . . (*And Marries Another*, Peabody: Hendricksen, p. 48 (1991).

There are some, like the present writer, who do not oppose remarriage following a scriptural divorce, who accept the teaching of the present tense in the Lord's words. "Extremely literal interpretation" is language meant to prejudice the mind of the reader, especially so in view of the fact that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all use the present tense. He asserts that it does not mean what it says. Why? -- then "we must advocate breaking up all marriages subsequent to the first." First of all, the consequences of a Scripture teaching are not to be rejected because we do not want the consequences (a not uncommon practice, however). Secondly, in this paper the reader will find the subject of the governmental ways of God brought to bear on this matter, with the conclusion that the adulterous marriage is not to be broken up, and the guilty, if repentant, are to bow to God's government upon them.

Here is another false piece of reasoning by this scholar that we have anticipatively answered in the text, above, when considering help from Rom. 7:2, 3:

If Jesus is not speaking hyperbolically, if any marriage after an invalid divorce is therefore adulterous, it is only because the divorce was invalid and the original partners are still actually married in God's sight (*ibid.*).

As another example, J. Carl Laney, who holds a no-divorce, no-remarriage view concerning Christians, noting the present tense, said:

Since the present tense, "commits adultery," can be used to argue in favor of either view {on-going status, or punctiliar act}, it seems the matter must be decided on other clear statements of Scripture {as if Matt. 19:9, and Mark and Luke, are not clear!}.

Should sexual intercourse between married partners cease? Not according to Paul (1 Cor. 7:5). Should marriage end in divorce? Not according to Jesus (Mk 10:9; Mt 19:6). It may be that confessing the sin, but continuing the marriage is the least culpable course of action for the divorced and remarried (*Divorce and Remarriage, Four Christian Views*, Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, pp. 39-41, 1990).

William A. Heth, from a divorce, but no remarriage standpoint, wrote:

Based on grammatical possibilities, the prohibition of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7:5, and Jesus' prohibition of divorce, we should lean in the direction of viewing the action as singular at the time of the marriage (*ibid.*, p. 59).

And Thomas R. Edgar, from a divorce and remarriage for adultery and for desertion viewpoint, also concludes, "nor is an improper marriage a state of continuous adultery" (*ibid.*, p. 62).

So you see that if for some reason you do not want the present tense ("commits adultery") to be a status of the marriage, it is not hard to find 'scholarly' evangelical backing. Indeed, one can find 'scholarly' evangelical backing for a vast variety of false things.

Recall in a note, above, D. A. Carson's remark concerning the exception clause and its meaning:

"Proposed solutions are legion; but there are seven important ones."



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