

## CHAPTER ONE

# MARRIAGE and DIVORCE

## INTRODUCTION

### THE DIVINE PURPOSE IN MARRIAGE

At the end of Old Testament times God was so moved by the unfaithfulness of His people to the covenant of their fathers in the matter of alien marriages that He sent His messenger Malachi with a heavy rebuke and an urgent warning of judgement to come (Mal.2:10-17). This emphatic condemnation of alien marriages and the divorces that often preceded them is valuable to us because of the very plain declaration of the divine attitude to divorce and the explanation which is provided of Yahweh's purpose in marriage for a covenant people.

Malachi 2:10-16 is therefore a good place to commence a consideration of the marriage and divorce texts because it both points us back to what God established in the beginning, and forward to the teachings of that "godly seed" whom Yahweh ultimately raised up, despite the treachery of Judah in the days of Malachi. When the "messenger of the covenant" did come 500 years later he was "a swift witness against...the adulterers, and against false swearers" (Mal.3:5), and by his teaching demonstrated the truth of his Father's declaration as Israel's faithful covenant God, "I am Yahweh, I change not." For he taught, "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt.19:6), in total harmony with the statement of Mal.2:16 - "For Yahweh, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away."

### Malachi 2:10-16 - SEEKING A GODLY SEED

Verse 10 commences a passage which opens with three questions culminating in the charge, "Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?" The passage ends with an exhortation couched in terms of a warning, "Therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously."

Yahweh was a father to Israel (1:6), and had "created" them as His covenant people (Isa.43:1,7,21), as a consequence of which He required their undivided loyalty. "Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God is one Yahweh" (Deut.6:4), demanded a response in kind. God was singular: their service should be likewise - "And thou shalt love Yahweh thy God with **all** thine heart, and with **all** thy soul, and with **all** thy might" (Deut.6:5). But abomination was committed in Israel. Some had profaned the holiness of Yahweh and divided their allegiance by marrying the daughter of a strange god (V.11). Intermarriage with the gentiles was always inimical to the undivided service demanded by Israel's one covenant God - their Father who had created them (Ex.34:11-16; Deut.7:2-4). There were many examples of that, not the least Solomon, whose failure was also drawn to the attention of Malachi's erring generation by Nehemiah (Neh.13:23-27).

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This sin was grievous enough in its effects on the covenant status of Israel but the particular concern of Yahweh was for its impact on the development of "a godly seed", their Messiah, who was to rise from the midst of Israel. To Paul this fact was the greatest blessing afforded

his nation (Rom, 9:4-5). And because "it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah" (Heb.7: 14), it is Judah that is singled out as being chief in the sin of creating racial impurity (V.11). But alas, this was not all. The devastating consequences of intermarriage with the alien had been accrued at the cost of many broken marriages in Israel. In order to take foreign wives they had dealt treacherously with "the wife of their youth", and so many wives had been cruelly divorced that a flood of tears shed by the rejected daughters of Judah covered the altar and 'hid' the hypocritical offerings of the nation from God's sight. As they had maliciously repudiated their "covenant wives" to profane the covenant of their fathers, so God had rejected their divided service and deplored their hypocrisy and treachery.

It is in this context that allusion is made to an earlier creation by a God of oneness who as a father had made one man and one woman and joined them together in a covenant of affection and loyalty that as "one flesh" they might manifest the one great character of their creator whose mental and moral likeness they shared.

The covenant of marriage thus established became the very substratum of Israel's national existence as a covenant people. How was God's covenant to be fulfilled? Was it not through the development of a "godly seed" by faithful maintenance of a marriage covenant built upon the mutual sharing of the covenant of their fathers? How could there be "a residue of the spirit" if the first creative act of a God of oneness designed to establish permanent unity of purpose between a man and the wife of his youth had been frustrated.

Rotherham's translation of verse 15 is helpful in making this connection with verse 10 obvious:

"Now was it not One who made you who had the residue of the spirit? What then of that one? He was seeking a godly seed. Therefore should ye take heed to your spirit and with the wife of thy youth do not deal treacherously."

Yet despite Judah's treachery God's purpose was not frustrated. Nearly 500 years after Malachi's voice fell silent God found a faithful son of David (Luke 1:27) to whom He joined a faithful daughter of David (Luke 1:32;3:31) in a covenant of marriage based solely on the fulfilment of the covenant made to the fathers (Matt.1:18-25). As soon as he woke from sleep with the voice of the angel ringing in his ears Joseph took Mary as his wife, but their marriage was not consummated until after the birth of their "godly seed". Could a marriage have a higher purpose than this? What a contrast Joseph presented to his treacherous forebears in the house of Judah. Even as he had wrestled privately in dismay over the problem of Mary's apparent unfaithfulness the Scripture records his motivation as being just, merciful, and sensitive (Matt.1:19). What of the spirit that had motivated the men of Judah to mingle "the holy seed" with the aliens of the land (Ezra 9:1-2)! It is fitting therefore that the first "residue" of the spirit after the long silence following Malachi should be:

"The book of the generation (Gr. genesis of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt.1:1). Israel's covenant God had not allowed the treachery of the men of Judah towards their covenant status and their covenant wives to prevent Him from bringing forth "a godly seed".

It is worth noting the remarkable similarity between the matters related above and the structure of Genesis 4:19 to 5:3. The record of boastful Lamech the first polygamist (polygamy was the forerunner of divorce) is followed by the account of the birth of "a godly seed", Seth, who with the arrival of his son Enos distinguished himself and his family from the line of Cain by dedication to the name of Yahweh (later to be declared the covenant name).

Gen.5:1 begins (somewhat like Matt.1:1) with the words, "This is the book of the generations of Adam". Then the creation of Adam and Eve is recounted in terms which highlight the unity established between them by God's creative act. Gen.5:3 then records the birth of Seth (who of course was not the firstborn in the image and likeness of Adam by which a "godly seed" was produced).

Inevitably we are drawn back to Genesis to consider the arrangements that God laid down "in the beginning".

## CHAPTER TWO

## 'IN THE BEGINNING'

**The Creation of Adam and Eve - Gen.1:26-28**

On the sixth day the Elohim brought to a climax the creative works of God, saying, "Let us make man in our image and after our likeness." These were the two features that distinguished man from the animals created by the Elohim that same day.

The Hebrew word for "image" is **tselem** and signifies a shadow, or image, ie. a physical likeness. While the word "likeness" is **damuth** from the root **damath** meaning to bring together, to compare; and from its use appears to define capacity, authority, or status. To this Bro. Thomas adds some helpful words in *Elpis Israel* (pages 38 & 39):

"Man, however, differs from other creatures in having been modelled after a divine type or pattern. In form and capacity he was made like to the angels, though in nature inferior to them." ..... "The import of the phrase "in the image, after the likeness" is suggested by the testimony, that 'Adam begat a son in his own likeness, after his image, and called his name Seth'." .. .. "Would any one be at a loss to know the meaning of Seth's being in the image of his father? The very same thing is meant by Adam being in the image of the Elohim. An image is the representation of some form or shape;.. The resemblance, therefore, of Adam to the Elohim as their image was of bodily form, not of intellectual and moral attainment;.. ..In shape, Seth was like Adam, Adam like the Elohim, and the Elohim, the image of the invisible Increate; the great and glorious archetype of the intelligent universe."..... Seth was also 'in Adam's own likeness'. While image, then, hath reference to form or shape, 'likeness' hath regard to mental constitution, or capacity. .. Adam's mental capacity enabled him to comprehend and receive spiritual ideas, which moved him to veneration, hope, conscientiousness, the expression of his views, affections, and so forth. Seth was capable of the like display of intellectual and moral phenomena; and of an assimilation of character to that of his father. He was therefore in the likeness as well as in the image of Adam; and, in the same sense, they were both 'after the likeness of the Elohim'.

Adam was thus made in both the physical image, and the mental and moral likeness of his creator. The purpose of this was that he might reflect the moral glory of his maker and exercise dominion over the carnal things of the lower creation. But he was not to do this alone, for immediately following the words stating the angel's intention to create man in their own image and likeness the objective is also stated; 'And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea....' (V.26)".

Adam was to be given a partner with whom he might share equally this dominion in the moral realm, for this is the import of the angels' words here (compare Ps.8:3-8 and 1 Cor.15:24-28). Adam and Eve were quite unique in the physical creation and their dominion over it was to symbolise the dominion of the mental and moral powers which God had given them above all other created things. Eve was to share equally with Adam that dominion,

though by his primacy he would always remain her head, and would ultimately become her 'lord' due to her being first in the transgression (Gen.3:16).

The vital point being made therefore in verse 26 is that the shared spiritual objective of manifesting the mental and moral likeness of God in order to exercise dominion over carnal things was to transcend all other considerations in the union of male and female. This becomes clear by a careful analysis of the next verse which records the accomplishment of the angels' purpose.

In verse 26 the angels had said, "Let us make man (Heb. **adam**)"; and clearly declared their intention to create a plurality - "Let them have dominion." Verse 27 records: "So Elohim created the Adam in his own image, in the image of Elohim created he him; male and female created he them." It will be noted that reference to "likeness" is absent from this verse, but twice there is reference to "image". Why should this be?

The Apostle supplies the answer in his treatise on this passage in 1 Cor.11: 7-10. "The Adam" was unique in creation for he alone possessed both "the image" (Gr. **eikon** - a physical likeness) and glory (a mental and moral likeness) of God: but the woman is the glory of the man." Paul omits reference to the woman's physical shape for obvious reasons, for she is a reflection of her 'head' in one way only. Eve shared in common with "the Adam" a mental and moral likeness to God. We can surely perceive in this creative work at the foundation of the world a majestic foreshadowing of Yahweh's purpose in the second Adam.

The physical differences between Adam and Eve are highlighted in the closing phrase of verse 27: "Male and female created he them". The Hebrew words chosen to differentiate between them are significant. "Male" is **zakar** - remembered, ie. a male (as being the most noteworthy sex); from a root, to mark (so as to remember). The word is used extensively of sexual appearance and therefore of identity. "Female" is **neqebah** referring to the female form. The word is from the root **naqab** and by reference to a Lexicon it will be observed that it gives to its derivative a sexual connotation.

So then the emphasis of verse 27 is upon the physical fact of Adam and Eve's creation. First there was "the Adam" made in the very image of God Himself but not seen to be complete until provided with a partner exactly matched to him. They were made to be joined in marriage: yet not simply because of their physical shape. The last word of the verse (for so it is in the Hebrew) "them", takes us back to verse 26 - "Let them have dominion." Is this not directing our attention to the great fact of their creation? Was not their union as husband and wife based first and foremost upon a spiritual foundation?

In a marvellous way Yahweh is setting forth the principles of true marriage which are to be elucidated in the second chapter. Though physically different in order that they might be matched, they shared one thing in common from the very instant of Eve's creation - a mental and moral likeness to their creator.

The divine order, *mental*, *moral*, and then *physical* has always been the only sound basis upon which to build a successful marriage. Where a man and a woman share an understanding of principles of truth and declare their love for those principles by a pursuit of

the development of God's moral attributes in their lives, a union may ensue which will be "fruitful and multiply" those who likewise can exercise dominion over carnal things.

## WHAT GOD JOINED TOGETHER

### The Formation of the Woman--Gen.2: 18-22

Within a very short while after the creation of man the Elohim affirmed the incompleteness of their work. "The Adam" they had made in their own image and likeness, stood alone amidst a vast creation; a solitariness that was all the more acute for the teeming myriads of living creatures that filled the scene around him, without apparent relation to him. Even when the Elohim brought some of the newly created beasts and birds to him he could elicit no sensible response from them. Though he sought reciprocation by giving them names that were to remain with them, no meaningful response was forthcoming. This very exercise of dominion over the inferior creatures only served to emphasise his isolation from them. Something else was needed, and the Elohim were about to finalise their work by making "the Adam" complete in the last and fairest of all God's creatures. Bro, Thomas beautifully summarises the need for the creation of the woman in these words (Elpis Israel page 47):

"Adam, having been formed in the image, after the likeness of the Elohim on the sixth day, remained for a short time alone in the midst of the earthborns of the field. He had no companion who could reciprocate his intelligence; none who could minister to his wants, or rejoice with him in the delights of creation; and reflect the glory of his nature. The Elohim are a society, rejoicing in the love and attachment of one another; and Adam, being like them though of inferior nature, required an object which should be calculated to evoke the latent resemblances of his similitude to theirs. It was no better for man to be alone than for them. Formed in their image, he had social feelings as well as intellectual and moral faculties, which required scope for their practical and harmonious exercise. A purely intellectual and abstractly moral society, untempered by domesticism, is an imperfect state. It may be very enlightened, very dignified and immaculate- but it would also be very formal, and frigid as the poles. A being might know all things, and he might scrupulously observe the divine law from a sense of duty; but something more is requisite to make him amiable, and beloved by either God or his fellows. This amiability the social feelings enable him to develop; which, however, if unfurnished with a proper object, or wholesome excitation, react upon him unfavourably, and make him disagreeable. Well aware of this, Yahweh Elohim said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a help fit for him.' Yahweh Elohim declared 'I will make him an help meet for him'."

The Hebrew words **ezer kenegdo** translated 'an help meet for him' literally mean a helper who is 'one as his front.' The margin of the A.V. is sound, 'as before him'. The sense is of one exactly suited to Adam's need. Hence Rotherham's good translation, "I will make for him a helper as his counterpart." The Berkeley version has, "a suitable helper, completing him." Bro. Thomas translates, "a help fit for him", and goes on to graphically describe the formation of Eve in contrast to the inferior animals:

But in the formation of a companion for the first man, the Lord Elohim created her upon a different principle. She was to be a dependent creature; and a sympathy was to be established between them, by which they should be attached inseparably. It would not have been fit, therefore, to have given her an independent origin from the dust of the ground. Had this been the case, there would have been about the same kind of attachment between men and women as subsists among the creatures below them. The woman's companionship was designed to be intellectually and morally sympathetic with "the image and glory of God," whom she was to revere as her superior. The sympathy of the mutually independent earthborns of the field, is purely sensual; and in proportion as generations of mankind lose their intellectual and moral likeness to the Elohim, and fall under the dominion of sensuality; so the sympathy between men and women evaporates into mere animalism. But, I say, such a degenerate result as this, was not the end of her formation. She was not simply to be "the mother of all living", but to reflect the glory of man as he reflected the glory of God. To give being to such a creature, it was necessary she should be formed out of man. This necessity is found in the law which pervades the flesh. If the feeblest member of the body suffer, all the other members suffer with it; that is, pain even in the little finger will produce distress throughout the system. Bone sympathises with bone, and flesh with flesh, in all pleasurable, healthful, and painful feelings, hence, to separate a portion of Adam's living substance, and from it to build a woman, would be to transfer to her the sympathies of Adam's nature; and though by her organisation, able to maintain an independent existence, she would never lose from her nature a sympathy with his, in all its intellectual, moral, and physical manifestations. According to this natural law, then, the Lord Elohim made woman in the likeness of the man, out of his substance. He might have formed her from his body before he became a living soul; but this would have defeated the law of sympathy; for in inanimate matter there is no mental sympathy. She must, therefore, be formed from the living bone and flesh of the man. To do this was to inflict pain; for to cut out a portion of flesh would have created the same sensations in Adam as in any of his posterity. To avoid such an infliction, 'the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept.' While thus unconscious of what was doing, and perfectly insensible to all corporeal impressions, the Lord 'took out one of his ribs, and then closed up the flesh in its place.' This was a delicate operation; and consisted in separating the rib from the breast bone and spine. But nothing is too difficult for God. The most wonderful part of the work had yet to be performed. The quivering rib, with its nerves and vessels, had to be increased in magnitude, and formed into a human figure, capable of reflecting the glory of the man. This was soon accomplished; for, on the sixth day, 'male and female created he them': and 'the rib which the Lord God had taken from man, he made a woman, and brought her unto the man'."

Thus created, Eve provided for Adam a perfectly matched counterpart, able to fully reciprocate in every mental, moral, and physical aspect of his experience. And most importantly of all, their association enabled them to draw from each other those "latent resemblances" of character which they shared with the Elohim, but towards which they were differently inclined. For though made in the mental and moral likeness of God the man and the woman possessed different intrinsic inclinations which, when harmonised in mutual development, could produce in them both a manifestation of the beautifully balanced character of their creator. Bro. Roberts in "The Law of Moses" page 220 put it this way:

"Man is for strength, judgement, and achievement. Woman is for grace, sympathy, and ministrations. Between them they form a beautiful unit: heirs together of the grace of life."

Man's natural inclination towards the executive qualities of God's character was to be balanced by the woman drawing from him the sympathy and compassion of which he was entirely capable, but to which he was not so naturally inclined. Likewise the man was to draw from the woman those executive qualities of the divine character to which by her constitution she was not so inclined as he.

### **ADAM AND EVE UNIQUE**

There was a uniqueness in Adam and Eve's relationship that cannot be fully shared by any of their descendants who marry. Eve was the only woman ever to be created from the substance of her husband's body. "The law of sympathy" established between them was consequently very intense. It was a special relationship with a special significance for God's future purpose in the Second Adam.

It was of course, the uniqueness of Eve's formation from the side of Adam that formed the basis of Paul's treatise on marital responsibility in Ephesians 5:21-33. Citing Gen.2:23-24 he spoke of the great secret of Christ and his bride and the example this provided for husbands and wives, and concluded, "Nevertheless ye also, do ye individually. Each man be so loving his own wife as himself, and the wife see that she reverence her husband" (Eph.5:33 Rotherham). The Apostle makes it clear that though there was indeed a uniqueness about Adam and Eve in foreshadowing the greater union of Christ and his bride, all who are married in the truth have a responsibility to understand and implement the principles established by God in Eden. The sympathies are there in each of us, and they are intrinsic, but in our case they need to be particularly cultivated by each partner in the marriage. Adam and Eve were truly "one flesh" by a creative act. Their descendants who marry are "one flesh" by a divinely established relationship based on the first marriage.

### **The First Marriage - Gen.2:23-25**

Presented with the companion provided by this final creative work of Yahweh Elohim, so especially adapted for his every need, Adam's appreciation is memorialised in his declaration, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Nowhere among the animals had he found one like this. And so now he named her after himself, not to exercise dominion but to share it; "She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

It is this statement that reveals Adam's comprehension of the divine purpose in marriage. For as the margin of the A.V. indicates, the words he chose were ISH (man) and ISHA (woman - "out of man"). **Ish** is a word used widely of man in the O.T. However at times it is used in contrast with other Hebrew words for 'man' to indicate a higher status or greater strength. For example Ps.49:2 calls upon "both low and high, rich and poor together" to give ear. The word for 'low' is **adam**, while 'high' is **ish**. So the contrast is drawn between ordinary men and mighty men.

Instructed by the Elohim and observant of their accomplishments Adam pronounced his total satisfaction with his new companion. "Flesh of his flesh" she could rejoice with him in the possession of the mental and moral likeness of God and the pursuit of the objective of



their creation: the manifestation of Yahweh's glorious character, that they might exercise together dominion over all carnal things. Now he could see that by sharing this objective in mutual love, loyalty, and support he could truly become a 'mighty' man like the Elohim themselves.

So they were joined in marriage; as Bro. Thomas comments in Elpis Israel pages 49 & 50:

"When the Lord God presented the newly formed creature to her parent flesh, Adam said, 'This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Ishah (or Outman), because she was taken out of Ish, or man.' Adam pronounced upon himself the sentence that was to bind them together for weal or woe, until death should dissolve the union, and set them free for ever. This was marriage. It was based upon the great fact of her formation out of man; and consisted in Adam taking her to himself with her unconstrained consent. There was no religious ceremonial to sanctify the institution; for the Lord himself even abstained from pronouncing the union. No human ceremony can make marriage more holy than it is in the nature of things."

Marriage being first and foremost a mental and moral relationship, it was next to be an actual union as well. While God had abstained from pronouncing the union, He did not abstain from pronouncing the principles that would govern this new institution of marriage for all time. Adam's words conclude at the end of verse 23. It is God who makes the declaration of verse 24: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife and they shall be one flesh". We know this was God speaking because Christ tells us so in Matt.19:4-6. Yahweh's edict here therefore requires careful analysis, as do the words of the Lord Jesus Christ in commenting upon it.

### **What God Joined Together - Gen.2:24 & Matt.19:4-6**

The very first word of verse 24 emphasises the truth of what has been stated above. Adam's perception that marriage was first a mental and moral relationship and then physical immediately elicits the divine approval, "Therefore"! This is an affirmation of the soundness of the foundations upon which the first marriage was built.

And then a curious statement is made. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife". Adam had no father or mother in the normal sense. So we must understand this to be a declaration that goes beyond Adam to involve all subsequent marriages. We note with interest however, that the word used by God for 'man' is also ISH, and the word for 'wife' ISHA. Again this is a confirmation of the real basis of marriage - mutual cooperation in pursuit of God manifestation.

The word for 'leave' is **azab** signifying to leave, and being in the active voice implies deliberate action. The word for 'cleave' is **dabaq** meaning to cleave, to adhere specially firmly as if with glue; to be glued. It is used extensively of physical things sticking to each other, especially parts of the body, but also of clinging to someone in affection and loyalty. There is nothing to suggest that sexual relations is the dominant meaning of this word. Although God is here speaking of all marriages and not just of Adam and Eve, and all marriages are consummated under normal circumstances; as we have seen this 'cleaving' was

primarily a mental and moral relationship bonded by mutual affection and loyalty in a common objective.

It is possible that Adam and Eve did not experience physical union until the conception of Cain during the transgression or afterwards, as may be inferred from Gen.4:1. If it be argued on the basis of Gen.1:28 that they understood their capacity to produce offspring, it is also evident that none had been produced until the time of the fall, however long that may have been. It needs to be emphasised that "what God joined" and declared to be "one flesh" was not the result of sexual union, but by the fact of Eve's creation. She was in a unique way, "bone of Adam's bone, and flesh of his flesh", and their mutual covenant of affection, loyalty, and cooperation established by "the law of sympathy" formed the basis of God's declaration. As we have seen the reference to leaving father and mother is the divine method of demonstrating that the principles established in Adam and Eve were to apply to every subsequent marriage.

### **Matt.19:4-6**

The Lord Jesus Christ in summarising the meaning of this declaration in Matt.19:6 chooses his words with precision and speaks very plainly: "Wherefore they are no more two, but one flesh." He who had "made them male and female" from one body henceforth saw them not as two, but as "one flesh". "What" God joined together in marriage was a male and a female (V.4) or a man and a woman (V.5) who had agreed to 'cleave' to each other. Notice the Lord does not say "who" God joined. The Greek preposition "what" is in the accusative case (a case which expresses the direct object of transitive verbs; primarily expressing destination or goal of motion), and is in the singular number and neuter gender. The object sought by God is obvious. He had permanently 'joined together' one man and one woman in a relationship closer than that existing between parents and children called "marriage", and had proclaimed them to be "one flesh" in that family unit or kinship relation. In the same way that a man cannot break the flesh and blood relationship with his parents that birth confers upon him, so man and woman are bound by an even closer relationship through marriage. A man may "leave" father and mother to marry, and even repudiate them or disown them as parents, but he cannot sever his relationship to them. So it is with marriage. Man may seek to break the marriage covenant and dismiss his wife, but he cannot dissolve the "one flesh" relationship. He may even establish another, but the first remains a stubborn fact. Hence the real force of Christ's warning against "putting a space between" what God had declared to be a "one flesh" relationship. Could there be a more powerful repudiation of divorce than this!

The last phrase of Genesis 2:24 is rendered by the Septuagint "they two shall be one flesh". This translation is perhaps supported by Christ who in quoting these words said, "they twain shall be one flesh" (Matt.19:5). If on the other hand the A.V. is correct, the Lord's addition of the word "two" strengthens his argument. Two had become permanently one before God in a special relationship.

But can we demonstrate even further that "one flesh" refers primarily to the family relationship and not to the sexual union involved in marriage? If we can establish this point, considerable light will be shed upon the whole subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. We will find the Law's prohibition of certain marriages helpful in this regard.

## "ONE FLESH"

The proper understanding of the "one flesh" relation in Genesis 2:24 as denoting the establishment of a new kinship unit or family is elucidated in the Law of Moses concerning forbidden unions (Lev.18:6-18; cp. also Lev.20:11-12,14,17,19-21; Deut.22:30; 27:20,22-23). The various prohibitions in Leviticus 18 are based not only on literal blood lines but also on what might be called 'blood' relationships created through marriage. A marriage union makes the man and wife more closely related than parents and children. In the words of Gen.2:24, 'they become one flesh'. Marriage thus creates both vertical blood relationships in the form of children and horizontal 'blood' relationships between spouses.

This is why, in Lev.18, a son is commanded: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness" (v.8). The phrase 'uncover nakedness' (**gillah ervah**) in this passage is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. The opening refrain directs: "None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him to uncover their nakedness; I am Yahweh" (V.6). Here 'near of kin' or 'close relative' (**se er besaro**) is literally "flesh of his flesh" (cp. Gen.2:23). These regulations interpret relationships of affinity (connection by marriage) in terms of the principle that man and wife are "one flesh", that is, kin or blood relations.

These regulations therefore define the limits within which an Israelite could seek a wife. The moment a man married a woman she became an integral part of his family in the same way in which children born into that family did. Similarly he became related to her immediate close relatives, and should his wife die or should he divorce her, he could not marry them. This is the clear implication of the ban on sexual relationships with one's mother in law (Deut.27:23), whether in a polygamous union (Lev.20: 14), or through remarriage after death or divorce (Lev.18:17). The ban on the wife's side extended to her issue by previous or subsequent marriages (Lev.18:17), but not to her sisters except during her lifetime (Lev.18:18). On the man's own side the ban was complete. He could not marry any of his own blood relations or any who had become related to him by marriage. The law of Levirate marriage is the only exception to these rules (Deut.25:5-10). These laws are not simply concerned with prohibiting sexual liaisons with another party when that person is formally married, for this is covered by the prohibition of adultery (Lev.18:20; Ex.20:14), but marriage after death or divorce is what is prohibited here. A little careful thought on the reason for such laws inevitably leads us back to Gen. 2:23-24.

## DO SEXUAL RELATIONS ESTABLISH A MARRIAGE?

This question needs to be decided because of the great emphasis placed on the consequences of sexual relations outside marriage by advocates of the view that remarriage is permitted following divorce for adultery. Reference is usually made to 1 Cor.6:15-18 to support the idea that extramarital relations "dissolve" the marriage bond. We shall examine this later in the context of the effect of adultery on the marriage bond.

Some light may be shed on this present question by considering the law concerning premarital intercourse (ie. that between a man and an unbetrothed girl) which is addressed in Exodus 22:16-17 and Deuteronomy 22:28-29. Four points are made in the Law. First, the couple must marry: the Hebrew wording seems to underline the idea that marriage is the normal and right course of action (Ex.22:16-17). Second, the man must pay the appropriate

bride-money: no sum is stated in Exodus, but Deuteronomy 22:29 fixes it at 50 shekels. Third, the man may never divorce this woman (Deut.22:29). And finally, Exodus says that if the girl's father refuses to consent to her marriage, the man must pay the bride-money. In other words, as long as the girl's father approves of the marriage, premarital intercourse as an unlawful act, for so it was, and still is under Christ's law) is not penalised in the same way as other moral sins involving married (or betrothed) people. The Law dealt with the problem in a positive way; requiring a life-long commitment for the deed but allowing the girl's father to decide her future. The act itself did not create a union that was valid, until approved by another. Consider as well the fate of a man involved in sexual relations with a betrothed woman (Deut.22:23-27). His deed resulted in death because of her commitment to marry another man. As a virgin she was regarded as another man's wife. There had been no union to establish that relationship.

This sequence of events in Deuteronomy 22 makes it clear that sexual relations alone do not make a marriage. This is also evident from the distinction in the Old Testament between a man's wife or wives, and his concubines (cp. Gen.22:24; Judges 8:30-31; 2 Sam.3:7; 5:13; 1 Kings 11:3).

Furthermore the Lord revealed that the de facto "marriage" of the woman of Samaria did not establish the man with whom she lived as her husband. "Thou hast well said, I have no husband: for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly" (John 4:16-18). This seems to confirm the view that sexual relations alone do not establish a valid marriage.

### **THE ESSENTIALS OF MARRIAGE**

Our consideration has brought us to a point where we can summarise the essentials that established marriage as a "one flesh" relationship. There are four:

(1) First, marriage involves the consent and intent of the will between partners. Marriage is first and foremost a binding covenant. The man or woman in the Old Testament who made a vow or took an oath in the sight of God did so in all seriousness. For a man to break his word and promise was to imply that God Himself is not faithful. This is no less true of a man's word in his marriage covenant. Moreover, the Lord's explanation of Gen.1:27 and 2:24 in Mark 10:9, "What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder", implies that there is more to this covenant than the husband and wife belonging to each other in mutual commitment. The third person negative imperative is used and it formulates absolutely the Lord's prohibition of divorce itself. It involves God Himself in the matter. It is also interesting to note that Christ's words on divorce and remarriage in the discourse on the mount are immediately followed by his discussion of oaths (Matt.5:31-37).

(2) Second, it appears that marriage should be ratified by the parents. Certainly, parental involvement in selecting a partner for their offspring was widely practised in Biblical times (Gen.21:21; 34:44; 38:6; Judges 14:2-3; Josh.15:16; 1 Sam.17:25; 18:20-27; etc. Even in the first marriage this principle was involved. Adam and Eve did not have parents in the ordinary sense, but God was their 'Father' (Luke 3:38). God not only gave His consent, but of course actually provided a wife for Adam and "brought her unto the man". The 'customs'

of this world have severely diminished the effectiveness of this valuable and ancient practice and society in general is the poorer for it.

(3) Thirdly, marriage involves public recognition of the union in accordance with the social and legal customs of the day. For marriage as an institution to be regarded as honourable, the fact of a union needs to be generally recognised.

(4) Finally, the physical consummation of the marriage should naturally follow to seal the covenant that forms the basis of the union.

#### **NAKED BUT NOT ASHAMED - Gen.2:25**

Sin had not yet entered to mar the mental and moral likeness of man to God and turn self-consciousness into shame. Sadly, that was to come (Gen.3:7). It is likely therefore that Gen.2:25 refers to more than just the absence of shame because of a lack of self-consciousness over their physical nakedness.

The creative work of God was now complete and this was wonderfully demonstrated by the beauty and harmony He had established in the relationship between the man and the woman. Nothing was lacking in what God had accomplished. They stood before each other, perfectly adapted to fulfil every need of the other. There was no embarrassment resulting from a sense of inadequacy in the sight of the other. Total harmony and complete satisfaction with God's provision brought them together without self-consciousness, and this despite the nakedness which revealed every particular of the other's person.

Such were the principles that established marriage "in the beginning".

## CHAPTER THREE

**DEUTERONOMY 24:1-4**

Next to the 'exceptive clause' passages Deut.24:1-4 is the most oft-discussed text concerning marriage and divorce. Many attempts have been made to determine what "the matter of nakedness" of verse 1 refers to, as a basis for explaining the 'exceptive clauses'. It is common to focus on verse 1 almost to the total exclusion of the purpose of the legislation as a whole. There must be a reason for the rather non-specific terms of verse 1 which have given rise to so much debate. Close examination reveals that many interpreters have concentrated on the wrong verse in this passage.

The first thing required here is an accurate literal translation:

"When a man has taken a wife and married her, and it happens that she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some matter of nakedness in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce, and puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; and if she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's, and the latter man hates her and writes her a bill of divorce, and puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife; her former husband who sent her away is not able to take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for it is an abomination before Yahweh, and you shall not cause the land to sin which Yahweh your God is giving to you as an inheritance."  
(Interlinear Bible - amended)

Three things need to be noted from this:

- (1) In the Hebrew there is no break in the text to the end of verse 4. The passage must be considered in its entirety.
- (2) There is no command or implied permission for a man to divorce his wife or permission for the woman, or the man, to remarry. That is not the purpose of this law.
- (3) Verses 1-3 constitute the protasis (the conditional clause of a statement) while verse 4 provides the legislation - a prohibition on remarriage to a previously divorced and remarried wife.

The next necessary thing is to understand the meaning and scriptural usage of certain Hebrew words employed in this passage which may help to avoid faulty interpretations. The important words are as follows:

Verse 1

**"man"** - ISH - a man; a male person. The term is used somewhat flexibly in relation to status, but not as to sex. The same word is translated "husband" twice in verse 3.

**"wife"** - ISHAH - woman, a female; of every age and condition whether married or not. Occurs also verses 3 and 4.

**"married"** - BA'AL - to be owner, master, lord.

**"some uncleanness"** - ERVAH DABAR - Lit. "a matter of nakedness". DABAR simply means a word, a matter or thing. ERVAH signifies nakedness and is the normal word for the nakedness of the sexual organs. Its first occurrence in Gen.9:22,23 leaves no doubt as to its meaning, nor does its use on 20 occasions in Lev.18. The word is translated 'nakedness' 51 times, 'shame' once (Isa.20:4), 'unclean thing' once (Deut.23:14), and 'some uncleanness' once (Deut.24:1). The word does not indicate moral defilement but simply points to some matter in connection with the genital organs.

**"divorcement"** - KERITHUTH - a cutting off. The word occurs again in verse 3, in Jer.3:8, and in Isa.50:1.

### Verse 3

**"hate"** - SANE - to hate personally.

**"husband"** - ISH. See note v.1. Should be rendered 'man' here as in v.1.

### Verse 4

**"husband"** - BA'AL - the owner, master, lord. The Hebrew pointing is the only difference between the one who has become a 'master' in marriage as in verse 1, and the one who is 'master' by virtue of his marriage (v.4). In every case in Scripture where this word BA'AL is found relative to a sexual relationship, it has to do with the husband who is the 'master' in a marriage.

**"defiled"** - TAME - unclean, impure, defiled, polluted. The word is used some 348 times in the O.T. to signify ritual or moral defilement.

**"abomination"** - TOWEBAH - disgusting; an abhorrence.

## **WHAT 'SOME UNCLEANNESS' CANNOT MEAN**

It has already been shown that ERVAH DABAR - "a matter of nakedness" does not of itself have a moral connotation pointing to some sin in the woman. If it had been intended by Moses that the Israelites should understand that he was contemplating situations wherein a husband divorced his wife because of some actual unclean condition or offensive personal habit, or that she was guilty of some reprehensible behaviour before or after marriage, there seems no doubt he would have used the word TAME not ERVAH. He does in fact employ the word TAME in verse 4 when after divorce and remarriage there is some question as to the status and condition, of the woman.

Whatever the 'some uncleanness' may have been, there are various sexual matters which could not possibly be included because the Law dealt specifically and summarily with them elsewhere. Some of these have been suggested as possible interpretations of Deut.24: 1 and need to be carefully considered. They are:

(1) ADULTERY - This cannot be what Moses meant - Adultery was punishable by death of both parties to the sin (Deut.22:22). The Law could not be in contradiction with itself and allow an adulterer to be 'set free' by divorce.

(2) PREMARITAL UNCHASTITY - In the case where a husband suspected his bride of unchastity before marriage and accused her of not being a virgin, the Law provided for an examination by the elders (Deut. 22:13-21). If found guilty, death was decreed. If not guilty,

the woman could never be divorced for any reason. Hence, Deut.24:1-4 could not apply to this case.

(3) PREMARITAL FORNICATION - Where complicity by a betrothed woman with her seducer could be established, both parties had to die (Deut .22: 23-24).

(4) PREMARITAL SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH AN UNBETROTHED GIRL--The Law provided for marriage as the only course, on condition that the girl's father consented and the prescribed payment was made (Deut.22:28-29). If the father did not consent to the marriage the girl could be given to another man in due time. It is obvious that in this case "the tokens of her virginity" would be absent and the father would inform her suitor that she was not a virgin. Only in this way could he avoid the likelihood of an accusation in terms of Deut.22:13-21. In any case, if the father failed to do so, the matter would be dealt with under this latter legislation.

This leaves one final sexual matter which some feel is the specific case referred to in Deut.24: 1. This is the case of:

(5) PREMARITAL RAPE OF A BETROTHED WOMAN -- The Law required the death of the offending man, but if the innocence of the woman could be established she was free to marry her betrothed (Deut. 22:25-27). It is suggested that this woman might marry her betrothed only to later have her unfortunate past undermine the marriage and provide a basis for divorce. Might not the tragedy of her past have resulted in frigidity or inability to bear children? There are possibilities here, but also some real difficulties.

Would it be possible for a crime requiring the execution of a rapist to go unnoticed by her betrothed? Surely both offender and victim would come under considerable public scrutiny. Even if we allow the possibility of the news not reaching the girl's intended husband, how can we conceive of any father allowing the marriage to proceed without apprising the man of the bride's unfortunate experience? Would not such insensitivity expose his daughter to dire peril? And even if the matter had been kept quiet originally by the woman (and this was perilous for her) or by her father later, would not the discovery of her problem lead to an examination of her case in terms of Deut.22:13-21, resulting in either her death or acquittal - the latter never permitting her to be divorced?

There is another consideration which makes this suggestion difficult to sustain. In Deut.24:2-3 Moses mentions the possibility of a woman once divorced for a matter of "nakedness" being put away a second time, presumably for the same reason. The second man would have known of her state, because her original husband had given her a "bill of divorcement" as a legal instrument enabling her, according to current practice, to remarry without fear of accusation. This second man could hardly claim any legitimate grounds for divorce if he had taken the simple precaution of enquiring into the reasons for the original divorce.

Despite these problems this suggestion is the only one of all those considered that has any possibility of being correct, lest the Law be made to conflict with itself. But do we need to restrict "a matter of nakedness" to any narrow or specific problem on the woman's part? Is



not the problem addressed by this legislation with the man, her original husband? Christ said it was for hardness of heart that Moses gave them this precept (Matt. 19:8; Mk.10:5). He gave no hint that the man was in any way justified in putting away his wife. Surely the broad and deliberately non-specific term used by Moses, preceded by the suggestive words "and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes", indicates that what we have here is a problem of general dissatisfaction with a sexual relationship which leads a hard-hearted man to unburden himself of an unwanted woman.

We conclude therefore that, "the matter of nakedness" refers simply to dissatisfaction by the husband with the marital sexual relationship for which he blames his wife, and hasten to add that under no circumstances can Deut.24:1 4 be seen as a permission for divorce, or as legislation designed to provide grounds for such.

### **AN EXPLANATION OF THE LEGISLATION**

Once it is appreciated that verses 1 to 3 are merely a series of conditions which lead to the absolute prohibition of verse 4, much of the fog that has surrounded this passage can be lifted. We do not need to establish with any certainty what "the matter of nakedness" (V.1) refers to in order to understand the purpose of this law. And if we can ascertain the purpose of this law we will be better placed to test the various interpretations that have been placed on Christ's supposed references to it in Matt.5:32 and 19:9 (the 'exceptive clause' passages).

The situation Moses dealt with here was the abuse of the principles of marriage by hard-hearted Israelites who sought to dismiss a wife because of dissatisfaction in some aspect of their sexual relationship. It needs to be recognised that the Law operated in an environment where polygamy, slavery, and divorce were accepted practices in human society. Long subjected to the evils of Egypt, Israel as a nation was severely affected by various ungodly practices which the Law sought to control by regulation and restriction. That the Law did not outrightly prohibit divorce, polygamy, and slavery is testimony to the limitations of a national code in eradication of such evils. Grappling with the practical realities of a hard-hearted society, Moses 'suffered' the demand for the right to divorce, and thus without providing permission, did give in these words tacit recognition to the widespread and endemic nature of this severe problem.

The law envisaged a typical case of a hard-hearted Israelite putting away his chosen spouse because of sexual dissatisfaction and in following the custom of the time, "writes her a bill of divorcement" (note that the A.V. "then let him write" v.1 is not an acceptable translation - there is no command, permission, or direction implied), and dismisses her after having put the instrument in her hand. The fact that various onerous steps were taken by the man in order to execute his wish indicates his hard-hearted determination to be rid of this woman. If these steps had been laid down by Moses as a deterrent to divorce, it is also clear he had in mind a man who would not be deterred regardless of the conditions imposed, and the focus must be kept on *this man*.

The case envisages a further tragic development, doubtless oft-repeated in Israel. The rejected wife goes and remarries! No permission is given for this; there being no word for "may" in the Hebrew text or any equivalent for the italicised "wife" of verse 2. Literally we read, "and goes and becomes another man's". This latter also hates her and dismisses her by

the same process, although his legal status in society as a husband is not recognised by Yahweh who twice refers to him through Moses simply as ISH - man ("husband" on both occasions in verse 3 is ISH). And then in order to emphasise the extent to which the legislation of verse 4 will reach, the death of this second man is also advanced as a possible eventuality.

Then comes the crucial fourth verse. Whatever the cause of the woman's release, the original husband (her real master - BA'AL) is strictly forbidden to remarry her. This is interesting, for the inference in the case is that the woman may be willing to return to him. But under no circumstances is he to take her again "after that she is defiled". The word here for "defiled" (TAME) may indicate either her current moral state in the divine sight or simply refer to the fact of the consummation of her second 'marriage'. The word is used widely for ritual defilement as well as moral defilement. It is doubtful the word is chosen to indicate that the woman was an adulterer through what God clearly did regard as an illicit union with another man, for the law would then be seen to be anticipating the teaching of Christ (and all agree that Christ taught at least that remarriage after divorce for reasons other than immorality is adultery). It is possible the law may have hinted at this, for it is indeed correct that God has always so regarded it. But it must be acknowledged there are some problems with this interpretation.

This legislation was designed for Israelites who, as verses 1 to 3 indicate, regarded divorce and remarriage under the circumstances related to be quite legal. That Yahweh did not, and could not, according to His principles, recognise such a remarriage to be acceptable is plainly demonstrated by the language used. The woman was "another man's"; he was not her "husband" (BA'AL - lord or master) like the former husband, and her second marriage had 'defiled' her. If this last term was intended to convey the idea that adultery of itself prevented remarriage of the original partners then surely that fact would have been more plainly stated. Furthermore, if the second man was dead as envisaged in the case, a prohibition on remarriage purely for adultery seems to lose its force.

Again we have a situation where interpretation depends on the inference of a non-specific term, and again it must be pointed out that the focus here is in the wrong place. The "abomination to Yahweh" which "caused the land to sin" is not so much the moral state of the woman, but the remarriage of a man to his previously divorced and remarried wife. It is the man's problem which must be focused upon, not the woman's. To be literal, verse 4 says he "is not able to turn back to take her to him to be to him for a wife" (Young's Literal). Why not? Do the Scriptures anywhere preclude a man from receiving back a woman who has had sexual relations with another man?

A number of reasons for this absolute prohibition on remarriage to a divorced and remarried wife have been suggested. They are:

(1) The man had acted with such hard-hearted determination to reject his wife whom he had virtually forced into an illicit union with another man, that it was totally incongruous that he should be allowed to remarry her. The sanctity of marriage would be completely denigrated and brought into general disrepute if this was allowed to occur.

(2) If this man had rejected his wife permanently because of dissatisfaction with the sexual relationship and she had been 'defiled' by another marriage, how could he genuinely claim a desire to take her again? Would this not make light of his original decision? By this prohibition God made him hold to that decision. He forfeited any right of recovery at the point of her remarriage.

(3) Related to the above reasons is another based on protection of the rights of the woman. The prohibition prevents her being used as a chattel by a capricious husband.

Denigration of the institution of marriage by capricious divorce was certainly an abomination to Yahweh (Mal.2: 16), and there can be no doubt of His concern for the rejected wife (Mal.2:13-14; Ex.21:7-11; Deut.21:10-14). Divorce was practised in Israel by hard-hearted men. It was fitting that their hard-heartedness should be memorialised by a ban on recovery of the marriage.

(4) Another curious reason which has been suggested is that this law is related to the prohibitions against 'incestuous marriages' laid down in Lev. 18 and 20. The word "defiled" (TAME) occurs 8 times in Lev.18 and twice in Lev.20 in a context which deals with forbidden unions. Among these are absolute prohibitions against a man uncovering "the nakedness" (ERVAH) of his close relations who though not related to him by blood are related to him by marriage ties. To be precise, a man could not take a wife from among any relation of his own side or from any immediate blood relation of his previous wife (her mother or offspring - Lev.18:17). If he did so he would be marrying his own "flesh and blood" and "it is wickedness" (Lev.18: 17) "for all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled" (Lev.18:27).

But why the prohibition on marriage to a relation with no actual blood ties? The simple answer to this lies in the divine declaration "in the beginning" (Gen.2:24). God declared that ALL marriages would establish a "one flesh" relationship between two people who previously had no blood connections at all. They became more closely related than parents and children, and consequently were related to the immediate vertical relations on the other side, as well as to all members of their own family. Hence, any marriage to those relations or "near-kinsmen" was forbidden by God under the Law. This was perfectly consistent with the foundation principles of marriage established in Eden. The fact that such unions occurred among the patriarchs does not imply divine permission any more than did the practice of polygamy among them mean that God approved that either. The patriarchs did not have Genesis or the Law of Moses to guide them in such matters.

And moreover the development of the human race from Adam and Eve and then again from the family of Noah necessitated such marriages. The law forbidding them when necessity no longer required such unions puts the matter in its proper perspective from God's point of view. The only exception to this prohibition under the Law was the case of Levirate marriage where the law of family inheritance took precedence.

Consider then the case of the man in Deut.24:1-4 who has put away his closest relative who goes from him and establishes another union that is recognised in society. Can he be permitted to remarry this woman who is still recognised by God as a "one flesh" relation of

his, despite the legal reality and seeming finality of the original divorce? By callously rejecting her and initiating divorce to allow her remarriage to another, not only has he forfeited the right of recovery, but has given public notice that he no longer regards her as his closest relation: she in fact has become another man's. But regardless of the space that has been put between what God made 'one flesh', she remains his own 'flesh and blood' still. If he turned to take her again, would this not be tantamount to a man attempting to marry his own kin? These were not to be considered as potential marriage partners, and by his hard-hearted action and her remarriage she had become like them. Their reunion under these circumstances was unthinkable. Might it not be that such a marriage was an abomination to Yahweh and the land caused to sin after the similitude of the nations which it had spued out before Israel? On this view Deut.24:1-4 harks back to Yahweh's appointments in Gen.2:24.

Whichever of the above views (or any other) might prevail in the mind of the interpreter, one conclusion is inescapable; divorce initiated by a man to rid himself of his wife and ending in her remarriage was abhorrent to Yahweh. We shall find this to be exactly Christ's attitude in Matt.5:32.

### **IN SUMMARY**

We have seen the need to interpret Deut.24:1-4 in terms of the intention of the legislation and to avoid imposing a meaning on Moses' non-specific terms which may suit our purposes for interpretation of subsequent passages, but which may also completely miss the point of this law.

The real issue of this law is the reason for the prohibition on remarriage of the original partners. Some reasons have been suggested and in summary it seems evident that whether one understands the prohibition on remarriage to be punitive or protective; or remarriage to a rejected wife (after she has consummated a union with another as virtually incestuous, one thing seems certain: the "one flesh" bond of marriage is not dissolved by legal or customary divorce nor by sexual relations with a third party. Moses' law provides no grounds for divorce and certainly does not teach a dissolution divorce paving the way for an acceptable remarriage in the divine sight.

On the contrary, the passage seems to imply that to seek a divorce is to try to break a relationship with one's wife that in reality cannot be broken. Just as we cannot 'divorce' our children from being our own blood relations, no matter how displeasing they may be, so a man cannot 'divorce' his wife who is his own flesh and blood through marriage. Thus Deut. 24:1-4 understands the "one flesh" bond of marriage to survive legal or customary divorce.

The larger issue is plain. Yahweh as a faithful covenant God and husband would never take the initiative to dismiss His wife (Isa.54:5) after the hard-hearted example of the men of Israel and so jeopardise the fulfilment of His covenants (Deut.24:4). Any breakdown in His 'marriage' would be the full responsibility of Israel. Only her complete abandonment of Him for others would provide sufficient grounds to 'put her away', and even then 'divorce' did not sever the marriage bond, as we shall see.

\* Adultery not resulting in death for lack of sufficient witnesses (Deut.17:6) could not be intended Where adultery was a fact the word TAME not ERVAH would be employed by

Moses in v.1 (Num5:13-14). TAME is only used in v.4 after another marriage had 'defiled' her. The trial of jealousy invoked in such cases resulted in acquittal or the curse of the Law (most likely death) - Num. 5:12-31.

## CHAPTER FOUR

**THE DIVINE EXAMPLE**

In response to Christ's absolute prohibition of divorce, predicated on God's appointments at creation (Matt.19:4-6), the Pharisees rejoined, "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to

put her away?" The Lord in reply did not pause to explain their misreading of Deut.24:1-4, but simply stated the reason for its existence: "Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so" (v.8). These last words may

be better rendered, "but from the beginning it has not been done this way' (New American Standard Bible), or "but from the beginning it hath not been so" R.V.). The verb being in the perfect tense (denoting the continuance of past action or its results down to the present) requires us to understand this as a repudiation of the notion that God regarded divorce under the Law as acceptable. He did not so regard it. The fact of its practise in Israel by hard-hearted men did not alter His principles established in the beginning, nor His own practise of them: witness His own example. Hard-heartedness is not a divine characteristic. God may suffer for a time the hard-heartedness of men but He cannot, and will not, emulate it.

From the beginning He has never done so. Therefore, it is important to consider Yahweh's example in dealing with His 'wife' Israel.

**THE FIGURE OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE IN JER.2 & 3**

Yahweh had been a faithful and loving husband to Israel from the time of their espousal, by which He called her out of Egypt to be His own (Jer. 2:2; 31:32; Isa.54:5). But Israel had forsaken her husband to play the harlot with many lovers (Jer.2:20,25; 3:1,2,6,13). "As a wife treacherously departeth from her husband" (Jer.3:20), Israel had forsaken Yahweh, who had no choice but to confirm her departure by giving her "a bill of divorce" (Jer.3:8), after the failure of numerous attempts to restore her to faithfulness ~Jer.3:7). However, the confirmation of this broken marriage by a bill of divorce, and the fact of Israel's union with many lovers did not result in the dissolution of the marriage bond in God's sight, for in prophetic terms He plainly declares that well over 2700 years later He would still be married to her.

The future message of Elijah the prophet to scattered Israel is outlined in Jer.3:12-15. When Elijah goes forth he will call upon Israel to acknowledge their iniquity and will deliver Yahweh's appeal to his estranged wife: "Turn, O backsliding children, saith Yahweh; for I am married unto you" (Jer.3:14). The word 'married' here is BA'AL; the same word used in Deut.24:1 of the original husband who becomes 'master' by marriage.

Since this is a status that creates a relationship that can only be dissolved by death (Rom.7:2-3; 1 Cor.7:39), and because Israel is not dead in God's sight, it follows that the marriage bond, though disrupted for a time by adultery, remains intact. The 'one flesh' relationship survived Israel's persistent harlotry and the "putting away" that was forced upon her merciful and solicitous husband. Because God still regards Himself as being married to Israel He has never sought another wife. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos

3:2) remains true to this day. God has married no other nation in Israel's stead, and notwithstanding the universal recognition of the fact of divorce, He has waited patiently for her to forsake her adulteries and return to Him. In this He has been perfectly consistent with His own principles laid down "in the beginning" and of course, with the subsequent teachings of His own Son.

Why then the allusion to Deut.24:1-4 in Jer.3:1? We need to explore an answer to this question. But before we do so, it is necessary to appreciate the context in which this quotation is found.

### **Jeremiah's Message to Jerusalem**

The context in which the quotation of Deut.24:1-4 occurs begins in Jer. 2:1. The prophet is commanded to "cry in the ears of Jerusalem" (2:2) to "the house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel" (2:4). Though the northern kingdom of Israel had been in captivity for nearly 100 years, all the tribes of Israel were represented in Judah due to the almost continuous migration from the north that had occurred following Jeroboam's apostasy. It was a small and decimated nation that fell to the Assyrians in the sixth year of Hezekiah. The presence of so many from the northern kingdom in Judah probably accounts for the use of "Israel" in such places as 2 Chron.28: 19,23; 31: 1; 34:33, etc.

Jeremiah's message was to be against Judah (1:17-19), but was to all the families of Israel which at that time comprised the nation. And so Yahweh reminds them of their beginning as His tender spouse in the wilderness (2:2), and proceeds to demonstrate that as an unfaithful wife they had repeatedly forsaken Him during their tenure of the land by going after false gods. It was for the incorrigibility of Israel in the north that God finally put her away (Jer.3:8), and now Judah had gone the same way and multiplied false gods in the land (2:28). This is the context that is before us. Jeremiah's initial message runs from chapter 2: 1 to 3:5 and should be carefully considered before an attempt is made to interpret the purpose of the quotation from Deut.24: 1-4.

### **A Literal Translation of Jer.3 :1**

It is necessary before turning in detail to verse 1 to find an accurate translation which may assist understanding. Rotherham translates: "He hath said, If a man send away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, will he return to her again? Would not that land be utterly defiled? And thou hast been unchaste with many neighbours and yet thinkest to return unto me! Declareth Yahweh."

A number of other versions support Rotherham's translation of the final sentence in this verse. It is not couched in the terms of an appeal by God for Judah to return to Him, but rather is an exclamation of astonishment and indignation that Judah in her corrupt state could even contemplate returning to her husband while she continued to consort with her lovers. This is borne out by the context. In verses 2 and 3 Yahweh immediately points to the idolatry of the high places and the continuing whoredoms of Judah as reasons precluding her return to Him. It was ludicrous for her to think that in such a polluted state God would take her back.

The frequent use of the word "return" (Heb. SHOOV - also translated "turn", occurs 11 times in Jer.3:1 --4:2) in this chapter should also be noted. Its use in verse 1 points to the reason for the allusion to Deut.24.

### **MOSES' PRECEPTS IN JEREMIAH'S PROPHECY**

That the essence of Deut.24:1-4 is summarised in Jer.3:1 is beyond dispute. Consequently two questions arise which must be addressed in this study. They are: (1) Who spoke the words referring to Deut.24:1-4 in Jer.3:1 --God or Israel? and, (2) Why was Deut.24:1-4 invoked in this context?

We will find the answers to these questions helpful in arriving at a clear understanding of the divine example.

#### **Who Speaks in Jer.3 :1 - God or Israel?**

The chapter begins with the words "they say" in the A.V. The margin however acknowledges that the literal Hebrew is simply, "saying". This is quite correct. Various translations (Rotherham, R.S.V., Jerusalem Bible, Moffatt) indicate that the chapter division is badly positioned and that it is Yahweh who speaks the words of Jer.3:1 following on from His expostulations in the previous chapter. If the chapter division is omitted and the first 5 verses of chapter 3 are read in conjunction with the latter portion of chapter 2, it will be observed that it is God who is "saying" the words taken from Deut.24:1-4, and not the nation as is suggested by the A.V.

And it will also be seen that this fits the pattern of a context in which God remonstrates with the nation over their hard sayings and evil doings; for He concludes this address with the charge, "Behold thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldest" (Jer.3:5). This pattern of contrary "sayings" runs through chapter 2 as Yahweh's "sayings" are laid over against Israel's sayings (Jer.2:23,25,27,31,35). An examination of Israel's sayings reveals their ignorance, stubborn waywardness, and incredible blindness which in itself is a proof that it is not they who speak in Jer.3: 1. The quotation from Deut.24: 1-4 is precise and succinct, and exactly represents the intention of the legislation, as we have previously understood it. That the nation could have produced such a summary of Moses' precepts in their present state of mind is highly unlikely.

That it is God therefore, who adduces Deut.24:14 in Jer.3:1 to combat the hard sayings of His people seems certain. But why should He do so?

#### **Why Deut.24:14 is Quoted in Jer.3:1**

We have already observed that the theme of espousal and marriage runs through the context of Jeremiah 2 and 3. The nation had treacherously departed from her husband (3:20; 2:5,13,17,19), and had committed adultery with many lovers - 2:20,25,33; 3:2-31. Yahweh as a faithful and merciful husband had sought repeatedly to restore His wife to faithfulness, but they had stubbornly resisted these attempts and had slain His messengers (2:30). The pinnacle of this resistance had come in the days of Manasseh, king of Judah who filled Jerusalem with the blood of "the poor innocents" - 2:34). But now in the days of Jeremiah's prophecy during the reign of Manasseh's grandson Josiah (3:6), who introduced a determined reformation in Judah, the attention of the people had been drawn to the horror of



their ways and the depth of their apostasy. This had produced some token changes in them, but without real sincerity (3:10), so that they now presumed upon the mercy of God and sought to return to Him without complete reformation. They claimed innocence of idolatry (adultery) and violence (2:23,35), and insisted that they were worthy of being saved from destruction by restoration to their husband (2:27,35; 3:1,4-5). But they had still not forsaken their lovers (2:25,33,36) and sought to place their trust in Egypt, who would finally reject them (2:36-37). Could their husband Yahweh restore them to Himself as a true wife under such circumstances as these?

The answer of course was, No! And that is why the legislation of Deut. 24: 1-4 is invoked. As we have seen, Moses' legislation did not deal with grounds for divorce, but with the fact of divorce and its consequences on remarriage of the original partners. A woman thrust away by a hard-hearted husband and "defiled" by remarriage could not return to her original husband. Rather, he was not permitted to return to her, even if she was willing to return to him. The situation here was quite different. God had not yet put Judah away for her adulteries as He had done with Israel in the north 100 years earlier. But like her sister, Judah had treacherously departed from her husband to consort with her lovers (2:25; 3:1-2,6-10). Her iniquities had separated her from her husband (Isa.59:2), and though He laboured mightily to restore her to faithfulness, this He could not accomplish until she acknowledged her sin and changed her ways (3:7,12-13). Judah refused to be ashamed and turn from her whoredoms because she had "a whore's forehead" (3:3). So God had no choice but to refuse her advances, though she feigned a desire to return to Him (3:10).

Worse than that, Judah claimed innocence of her great sins (2:35), and cried unto God to regard her as He had in the day of their espousal: "Have you not just now called to me, My father, thou art the friend of my youth --will he be angry forever, will he be indignant to the end?" (Jer.3:4-5 R.S.V.). Could God accept her approaches? Was she not wholly polluted in her adulterous state? Unlike the hard-hearted man of Deut.24: 1-4, Yahweh was not forbidden to seek her return, for He had not rejected her, nor was He guilty of compelling her into adultery. The problem was not with God, but with the nation. He would return to her (and quite justifiably so, for the prohibition of Deut.24:4 did not apply to him in this case), but He could not live with a determined and hypocritical adulteress. Hence, the reason for Yahweh invoking Deut.24:1-4 was to demonstrate His complete innocence in the breakdown of the marriage, and His absolute justification in refusing her return while she remained polluted with the idols of the land and continued to consort with "another man" - Egypt (2:36-37) . The roles of Deut.24:1-4 were totally reversed. The hard hearted Israelite found himself unable to return to a wife whom he had caused to be "defiled", in spite of her willingness to return to him. But in this case, though the husband remained completely free of culpability, the principle held true. The wife was 'willing', but wholly defiled by adultery. She had disqualified herself from returning to her husband. Of course, under the Law she would have been stoned to death, but God was here dealing with a nation that He could not destroy because of His eternal covenants.

It is a graphic contrast that is here presented between Yahweh as a faithful husband and the hard-hearted Israelite of Deut.24. Another contrast is drawn in the use of a bill of divorcement.

### **THE BILL OF DIVORCEMENT - Jer.3:8**

The word for "divorcement" (KERITHUTH - a cutting off) is the same word used in Deut.24: 1 and again is an obvious allusion to that place. The figure of marriage employed in this context is based on the familiar practices of the time. When an Israelite issued a bill of divorce it was for him a legal instrument terminating the marriage and permitting remarriage by both parties. We have shown that Deut.24:1-4 does not provide such permission and that the original relationship is not dissolved by the legal fact of divorce. That is what is reiterated in this passage.

God did not initiate divorce. Israel forsook him and refused to return! After many unsuccessful attempts at restoration He had no option but to confirm the existing fact and put her away. The figure of a bill of divorce is used to represent the finality of the Assyrian captivity, but not the finality of the marriage; "for I am married unto you" (Jer.3:14) still applies to this day--and there was no remarriage. Israel's ultimate restoration to her longsuffering husband is assured.

### **WHERE IS YOUR MOTHER'S BILL OF DIVORCEMENT? - Isaiah 50:1**

Speaking of the redemption of Israel and the final consolation of Zion whom he had put away, Yahweh enquired of Judah in the days of Isaiah, "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away?"

The inference is that He had never given her one. The following question confirms this; "or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you?" The answer is, None, because He had not sold her to anyone. How then do we reconcile this passage with Jer.3:8?

The context shows the subject of Isaiah's words to be Zion, whereas Jeremiah referred to the northern kingdom of Israel being given a bill of divorce. Zion was 'mother' to the "house of Jacob" which was "called by the name of Israel" and was now represented in the nation of Judah to whom Isaiah prophesied (Isa.48: 1). It was because of the iniquities of her children Israel and Judah (called 'sisters' in Jer.3~ that Zion had been put away (Isa.50:1), but Yahweh had given her no bill of divorcement, nor had He forsaken her (Isa.49:14-16). The figure here is identical to that employed by Ezekiel in the condemnation of Jerusalem (Ezek.16), which should be read in conjunction with Isa.50:1. Consequently, there is no contradiction between Isaiah and Jeremiah. Isaiah's subject is Zion or Jerusalem the place of God's choosing, while Jeremiah speaks of the bill of divorcement given in figure to the northern kingdom of Israel.

### **HOSEA AND GOMER -**

#### **Yahweh's attitude to a broken marriage**

Long before Jeremiah adduced the putting away of Yahweh's wife Israel as a warning to wayward Judah who as the remaining portion of His spouse was also about to be "put away", He had signified His attitude towards broken marriages to the nation of Israel by parable and prophecy through the northern prophet Hosea.

Instructed to take a wife of whoredoms, Hosea took to wife the harlot Gomer, by whom he produced a son Jezreel (Hos.1:2-4). But she continued to play the harlot, and her next two children were conceived in adultery (1:6-9; 2:4-5). Finally she left her husband altogether to

consort with her lovers and sold herself into slavery to them (2:5-7). Finding no consolation she was minded to return to her husband, but found herself enslaved by her whoredom. Only her husband could redeem this wretched woman from her state of bondage, and this he was commanded by Yahweh to do (3:1-2). Having been redeemed with the price of a slave, she was to abide many days in faithfulness to her husband, and not play the harlot (3:3).

So in a graphic way by a very distressful enactment Hosea set forth God's dealings with Israel. As a wife treacherously departs from her husband she had forsaken Him for others. God could say of Israel, "she is not my wife, neither am I her husband", for she had utterly forsaken Him, and ultimately He gave her a bill of divorcement (the Assyrian captivity), but He was still married to her, and would seek to restore her to Himself in righteousness and faithfulness ~2:14-20~. This is the future mission of Elijah and it will be successful: "Afterwards shall the children of Israel return, and seek Yahweh their God, and David their king; and shall fear Yahweh and His goodness in the latter days." (Hosea 3:5).

## CONCLUSIONS

The divine example in the matter of marriage and divorce is very clear and its implications for the teachings of the New Testament obvious. Let us summarise these:

- (1) Yahweh never initiated 'divorce' without intolerable provocation through persistent whoredom by his wife. His "putting her away" only came after sustained evidence of incorrigibility. When it became obvious she had utterly forsaken Him and would not return, He confirmed the reality by "putting away".
- (2) "Putting away" was designed to ultimately restore her to faithfulness. In a similar way, withdrawal of fellowship is to be employed to recover the wayward when all else has failed (1 Tim.1 :20; 1 Cor.5:5).
- (3) Yahweh never remarried. Thus the opportunity for restoration of His estranged wife always remained open.
- (4) God never regarded the reality of divorce or persistent adultery as being factors capable of dissolving the marriage bond. He remained "married" to Israel in spite of 'divorce'.
- (5) God always remained faithful to His covenant oaths notwithstanding the infidelity of His wife.

## CHAPTER FIVE

**NEW TESTAMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

Before commencing our consideration of the New Testament passages dealing with divorce and remarriage there are some important preliminary considerations that are necessary to lay a proper basis for interpretation.

It is essential to reinforce first of all the conclusion already reached from the Old Testament that adultery does not sever the marriage bond. Then we shall review some key N.T. words in the divorce debate, laws and customs in the time of Christ, and finally the history of the "exceptive clause" debate.

**DOES ADULTERY SEVER THE MARRIAGE BOND?**

Supporters of the 'divorce for adultery' view must of necessity attempt to prove that adultery breaks the marriage bond. It is generally accepted that the Lord's teaching in Matt.5:31 -32 and 19:9 plainly declares divorce and remarriage for any other reason than 'immorality' to be adulterous. Hence the need to demonstrate that adultery dissolves the marriage bond completely. One passage used to support this view is Paul's citation of Gen. 2:24 in 1 Cor. 6:16. Another argument is to assert that the adulterer is "dead". Let us examine these.

**1 Corinthians 6:16**

The reasoning applied to this passage is that because Paul's subject is illicit sexual intercourse with temple harlots he proves by his quotation of Gen. 2:24 that 'one flesh' refers principally to sexual relations. Consequently, though a man has been 'one flesh' with his wife, it does not prevent his becoming 'one flesh' with another woman by an illicit union.

And therefore, the original 'one flesh' is not something immutable and exclusive to a first marriage. It can be duplicated by sexual immorality or adultery and supersedes the original relationship. A frequent response to this view is to assert that Paul is referring exclusively to unmarried brethren who commit "fornication" with a harlot. This however cannot be sustained because the word "fornication" (PORNEIA) cannot be confined solely to sexual relations outside of marriage. This will become obvious when we come to consider the various words that are central to this subject. Immorality including adultery is the meaning of "fornication" in 1 Cor. 6:18. Our studies have already shown that "one flesh" implies much more than merely a physical or sexual bond, but this reading of 1 Cor. 6:16 confines it exclusively to sexual intercourse. It might be argued in support of this view that there was no intention on the part of these erring brethren to make a covenant commitment based upon mental and moral affinity between themselves and the harlot prior to an illicit union. In fact examination reveals it was this very separation of 'spirit' (mind) from body that was the basis of their justification for such immoral activity.

The answer to this problem lies as usual in an understanding of the context. From verse 12 Paul quotes a series of slogans developed by some in Corinth to justify their libertine activities. He immediately adds his own rebuttal to each and supplies a reason why their assertions could not be correct. For example, "meats for the belly, and the belly for meats"

(v. 13) sounds reasonable, but when used as a premise for their next assertion, expressly inferred in the same verse, that the sexual organs of the body might also be freely used (like the belly) with all-comers, the danger of their slogan is evident. They contended that the body was natural and its functions "lawful", while the mind was spiritual and 'separate' from the body. Paul shows this to be nonsense and focuses on their bodies as "the members of Christ" and "the temple of the holy spirit", and concludes by saying, "therefore glorify God in your body (some texts omit the words "and in your spirit") for it is God's", in verse 20. In other words dedication of the spirit to God and dedication of the body to sin was not only farcical, but impossible.

The man who joined himself to a harlot (ie. a temple prostitute) could not avoid making a commitment with the mind (See exactly the same principle in chapter 10:18-23). But how could he possibly think to do this when "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (verse 17). So the libertine philosophers of Corinth were silenced. If they joined themselves to a harlot they became 'one flesh' with her spiritually and bodily and as "adulterers" and "fornicators" were unfit for inheritance in the kingdom of God by a change to immortality (compare verses 9-11 with verse 14).

But did such an adulterous relationship sever their 'one flesh' relationship to Christ? No! For Paul says, "What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the holy spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own" (verse 19). Having been baptised into Christ they were members of his body, and only death, that is their permanent death after rejection at the Judgement Seat will sever that relationship. They may even go and contract a new 'marriage' after their espousal to Christ by leaving the truth, but this would not sever the original bond in God's sight. They will be called to judgement, and death will then end the relationship for ever.

It is true that men do break marriage covenants and by divorce attempt to "put asunder" what God made "one flesh". It is also true that by contracting a new marriage and consummating it men establish a new 'one flesh' (family) relationship. But this does not dissolve the first relationship in God's sight. Only death can dissolve that relationship (note Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor.7:39). It is for this fact that God views all remarriage after divorce as adulterous, regardless of the circumstances leading to the divorce.

### **Is Divorce Tantamount to Death?**

Another line of argument is to assert that because an adulterer was to be put to death under the law he should be regarded as 'dead' even when that law cannot be carried out, as in fact the Romans forbade in the times of Christ. This sort of reasoning does not even commend itself to logic, but it has been seriously suggested as an explanation of the "exceptive clauses".

The suggestion is that because under the law death of the adulterer allowed remarriage by an innocent surviving partner, so Christ upheld this right of remarriage for adultery alone. Consequently, divorce is substituted for death in that case. But the fact remains that the adulterer would still be living and may at some later stage seek to repent. This view rules out reconciliation through forgiveness by closing off the route to restoration. Apart from being

an entirely unacceptable interpretation of the "exceptive clauses" it deserves rejection on a number of grounds:

- (1) No legal fiction can change the fact: the adulterer was not dead but alive. Christ does not deal in legal fictions but in realities.
- (2) Only actual death dissolves a 'one flesh' relationship (Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:39).
- (3) Adultery was not the only sin punishable by death under the Law. What of other cases where capital punishment dissolved a marriage and allowed the survivor to remarry? Should they not also be included?
- (4) The Lord's term "for fornication" includes scope for other sexual sins apart from adultery. Does this mean that all sexual sin is virtually unforgivable?
- (5) Finally, this view is in total contradiction of Christ's absolute prohibition of remarriage after divorce in Luke 16:18 and Mark 10:11-12 despite the efforts that have been made to inject an 'exception' into these passages. However, Paul's interpretation of Christ's teaching in 1 Cor.7:10-11 is fatal to these attempts.

### **Herod and Herodias**

The blatant adultery, divorce, and remarriage of Herod Antipas to his brother Philip's wife which John the Baptist forthrightly condemned (Matt. 14:3-4) illustrates two points that are vital to this subject. John declared that "it was not lawful" for Herod to have Herodias as his wife. The reasons are obvious. Herod had seduced Herodias while visiting his half-brother Philip. Both Herod and Herodias then sought to divorce their partners in order to continue their illicit relationship. Once this was accomplished they married. Josephus in commenting on these events indignantly expresses his disgust that Herodias (a Jewess) had blatantly contravened Jewish law based on Deut. 24:1 which forbade a woman to divorce her husband that she might marry another. But John's condemnation is primarily aimed at Herod for his part in this gross and public evil and for his many other like corruptions (Luke 3:19).

The unlawfulness of Herod's actions was twofold. Firstly, he had committed adultery and then compounded the sin by divorce and remarriage. And secondly, he had taken to wife one of his own relations forbidden under Mosaic law (Lev. 18:16; 20:21). However, the Edomite family of Herods had always shown scant regard for divine law, especially in the matter of marriage to close relations. We may conclude therefore from John's attitude to this situation two things:

- (1) Marriage among unbelievers is just as binding on them as it is among believers. Divine law does not differentiate between marriage in the world and in the truth.
- (2) Adultery does not sever the real marriage bond which is a 'one flesh' (family) relationship that survives all the machinations of men to dissolve.

### **KEY WORDS**

Discussion centred upon the marriage and divorce texts invariably revolves around the meaning and usage of certain vital words. These include the words "fornication" and "adultery"; "divorce", "put away", and "depart" and a number of important words in 1 Cor. 7. The latter we shall consider carefully in the context of Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 7, but it may be helpful to clarify the meaning and usage in the N.T. of the other terms before proceeding. It is common to find arguments on both sides of this question which seek to confine the meaning and application of certain key words within very strict limits. For example, the word "fornication" (Gr. PORNEIA) used in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9 has been

interpreted variously to mean marriage within the prohibited degrees (i.e. to close relations), inter-marriage with Gentiles, premarital unchastity, and adultery. Entire arguments rest on unqualified acceptance of a very narrow meaning of a word and when this is breached the interpretation completely collapses. So it is that, in the literature (from within and without), much special pleading is evident in support of one view or another revolving around an exclusive meaning of a word. There is no need for this. The normal usage of a word in Scripture is usually a reliable guide to meaning and only the clear demands of a context for a more narrow or restricted meaning should be heeded. Let us examine the words mentioned above.

### **"Fornication" (Gr. PORNEIA)**

The word means illicit sexual intercourse. It is used in the N.T. of incest (1 Cor. 5:1); of consorting with temple prostitutes (1 Cor. 6:13,18); of the harlotry of Jezebel (Rev. 2:21); of sexual sin which may affect all members of an ecclesia (e.g. 1 Thess. 4:3). There seems to be no reason why attempts should be made to show that this word only involves unmarried people. Clearly it is a word that involves sexual sin in general, including adultery. A study of its use in the N.T. soon reveals the pointlessness of endeavouring to confine the meaning to one narrow sense in order to support a particular interpretation of Matt. 5:32 and 19:9. For instance, its use in Acts 15:20,29 in the Jerusalem Decree is suggestive of the generality of the term. It is ridiculous to suggest that James and the Apostles only had in mind unmarried converts among the Gentiles when placing a ban on "fornication"; or that only unmarried members were involved in Paul's charge to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 4:3).

PORNEIA seems to be the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew word ZANAH which is used extensively of whoredom and of playing the harlot throughout the Old Testament. The Septuagint invariably translates ZANAH by employing PORNEIA. Examination of the occurrences of ZANAH (refer Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance pages 389 & 390) illustrates that the idea of this word is of habitual and persistent sexual sin. Frequent use of ZANAH in Jer. 3, Ezek. 16 and 23 is adequate proof of this.

We conclude therefore that PORNEIA was specially selected by the Spirit to represent the word used by Christ in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9: that that word was probably ZANAH; and that he chose it to represent sexual sin in general. No fair assessment of PORNEIA and its N.T. usage will sustain the arguments which seek to specify a particular sexual sin, or those which have sought to confine it to unmarried people.

### **Adultery (MOICHEIA)**

This word relates specifically to the act of adultery; to have unlawful intercourse with another's spouse. As a verb MOICHEUO it is used in such places as Matt. 5:27,28; 19:18; Luke 16:18, etc. pointing to the action of adultery, including adultery in the heart (Matt. 5:28). As a verb in the middle voice MOICHAOMAI occurs twice in both Matt. 5:32 and 19:9, and in Mark 10:11,12. Bullinger says its meaning in these passages is "to commit adultery; to be guilty of adultery by causing another to commit it". This is perhaps an interpretative meaning but is certainly correct in the contexts in which it occurs.

The Septuagint employs MOICHEIA to translate the Hebrew NAAPH which always relates to marital unfaithfulness.

**"Divorcement" (APOSTASION)**

Signifies a defection; Lit. a standing off. Occurs Matt. 5:31; 19:7; Mk. 10:4 and is the Greek word selected to represent the Hebrew KERITHUTH - a cutting off (Deut. 24:1,3; Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8) .

**"Divorced" (APOLUO)**

Signifies to let loose from, let go free. It is used extensively in the sense of release, sending away, letting something go or granting liberty. As such it is an adequate term to represent the action and intention of divorce.

**"Put away" (APHIEEMI)**

Signifies to send forth, let go, forgive, to leave, leave alone, forsake, neglect. The word occurs frequently in the N.T., but in the context of marriage, only in 1 Cor. 7:11,12,13 where it is rendered "put away", "let (not) put away", and "let...(not) leave" respectively. That it does service for divorce is clear. However, it should be noted that the emphasis here is on the separation that is accomplished by divorce.

**"Depart" (KORIZO)**

Signifies to separate, divide. This word is translated "put asunder" in Matt. 19:6 and Mk. 10:9; and "depart" in 1 Cor. 7:10,11,15 (twice). Its other occurrences in the N.T. confirm its basic meaning to be separation by departure.

It is as well to familiarise one's self with these words and to mark their occurrences in the marriage and divorce texts.

**LAWS AND CUSTOMS IN THE TIME OF CHRIST**

It is vital in any consideration of New Testament teaching on divorce and remarriage to have an understanding of the laws and customs of the times which formed the background and created the environment in which those teachings were delivered. As we shall see, sound and scripturally consistent interpretations of problem passages are possible even without extensive background knowledge, but it certainly helps if one possesses some understanding of the circumstances which evoked the teachings of Christ and Paul .

**Roman Law**

When Christ was born, Judah's Commonwealth was firmly in the iron grip of Rome. Roman governors and procurators ruled the various segments of the land and Roman law prevailed. The Jews struggled to maintain the Mosaic law as a national code, albeit a code seriously deformed by Rabbinical philosophies, but certain punitive powers such as condemning to death grave offenders had been over-ruled by Roman law (John 18:28-31). Inevitably Jewish law was affected by the imposition of Roman rule.

Aspects of Roman law which concern our subject are briefly summarised:

(1) In BC 18 Augustus Caesar issued a law entitled Lex Julia de Adulteriis making adultery a penal offence punishable by banishment. Under this statute a husband was forbidden to pardon or quash a case of adultery against his wife. He was required to put her away and became liable for punishment himself if he continued the marriage.



- (2) Roman law did not permit capital punishment for adultery. Hence the trap set for Christ by the Pharisees in the case of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:3-6).
- (3) Roman and Greek law not only required divorce for adultery but recognised the absolute right to remarry after divorce.
- (4) Roman law allowed for a woman to divorce her husband (as indeed did Greek law).

### **Among the Jews**

Jewish laws, customs, and Rabbinical teachings at the time of Christ which are pertinent to this study may be briefly summarised thus:

- (1) Betrothal was for the Jews virtually marriage. Commitments were made and sometimes vows taken. Hence in both the Old and New Testaments betrothed women are referred to as 'wife' (e.g. Deut. 22:23-24; Matt. 1: 18-25).
- (2) Under Jewish law of the time a man was guilty of adultery if he took someone else's wife, but affairs with unmarried girls did not count as adultery against one's wife. This evil may be attributed to interpretation of Deut. 24:1 and the practice of polygamy.
- (3) Adultery was for the Jews, as for the Romans, a crime against the husband.
- (4) Under Jewish law a woman did not have the right to divorce her husband.
- (5) Unlike Roman law in which adultery was historically a matter of private family law until BC 18 adultery in Jewish law was first and foremost a sin against God (Ex. 20:4; Prov. 2:16-17). This sin demanded punishment by the Jewish community as a whole, and the husband of an adulterous wife would not be allowed to pardon her. Rather he was compelled by Jewish law in N.T. times to divorce his wife when fornication before marriage was discovered (Matt. 1:19) or adultery detected. The Jewish husband's moral duty was to divorce his wife in such cases.
- (6) The essence of a Jewish divorce was the declaration to the woman, "Behold, thou art permitted to any man." The aim of a bill of divorce in N.T. times was to permit the woman to remarry. It was regarded as a legal document attesting the dissolution of marriage.
- (7) Separation without the right of remarriage was unknown to the Jews in Christ's day (witness the bewilderment of the disciples - Matt. 19:9-10).

### **Rabbinical Teachings**

In the times of Christ there were two schools of thought on the meaning of Deut. 24:1 regarding acceptable grounds for divorce. The debate over this question revolved around the teachings of two prominent Rabbis.

Rabbi Hillel taught that a man could, with Moses' authority, "put away his wife for every cause"; that is, any minor infraction of marital harmony provided a basis for summary dismissal. If a wife for instance, offended by burning a meal or dressing improperly, the 'Hillelites' saw grounds for divorce. By this means marriage as a divine institution had been trivialised and denigrated among the Jews, for tragically this was the increasingly dominant view of the two schools of thought at the time. Ultimately a radical Rabbi of this school named Aquiba went as far as to teach that a man "may divorce his wife even if he has found a prettier woman". This of course had always been the real motivation behind unwarranted divorce.

The rival school of Shammai bitterly opposed the liberal views of Hillel and taught that "a man may not divorce his wife, except he found in her an unseemly thing (ie. unchastity)".

Thus in this school of thought the grounds for divorce and remarriage were restricted to sexual impropriety.

These opposing views formed the background to Christ's teaching in Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-12; and Mark 10:2-12. He was to demonstrate that both schools had completely misunderstood Deut. 24:1 and that remarriage after divorce is always adulterous.

### **THE EXCEPTIVE CLAUSE DEBATE**

The debate over the meaning of the so-called "exceptive clause" passages of Matt. 5:32 and 19:9 is centuries old and is certainly not unique to the Christadelphian community where it has been a source of contention and division for the best part of the Twentieth Century. There are two basic views on the substance of Christ's teaching, and many different interpretations of the meaning of the words and phrases which he used. It needs to be said at the outset that most, if not all of these interpretations have been canvassed and vigorously debated in the 'religious' world for centuries before there was a modern Christadelphian community. There is perhaps some value therefore in briefly reviewing the history of this debate.

#### **Two Basic Conclusions**

Regardless of approach to interpretation of the 'exceptive clauses' there are only two basic conclusions that can be reached. They are that:

- (1) Remarriage following divorce for any reason is adulterous; and
- (2) Remarriage following divorce for adultery is permissible (at least to the innocent Party).

'Authorities' (as far as they can be relied upon) say that the first view was that of the early 'church'. It has been asserted that in the first five centuries all Greek writers and all Latin writers except one agreed with this view. The second view did not gain currency in religious circles until the sixteenth Century when a Catholic theologian named Erasmus departed from standard teaching to assert the right of an offended party in a marriage to divorce and remarry where adultery had been committed. It is for this reason that those adopting the teachings of Erasmus on divorce and remarriage which first appeared in 1519 are called 'Erasmians'.

#### **Erasmian Motivation**

Why did Erasmus depart from orthodox Catholic teaching on this subject? One writer describes him as "a humanist par excellence". Another says, "Erasmus's humanistic concerns are evident in his approach to and exegesis of the divorce texts." Another writes, "In his interpretation of the New Testament logia on divorce Erasmus reveals himself as a Christian theologian who seeks to solve an ethical problem within Church and society by finding a solution based on Scripture and centred in Christ. No ecclesiastical institution should stand between the needy and the Good Samaritan. Erasmus appears not as an academic theorist but as a Christian pragmatist who is devoted to his Master in service for his fellow man." Finally, another writer adds, "For Erasmus, of utmost importance was the need 'to procure the salvation of all men as much as possible and to succour the weak and sick members of the Church. In other words charity should come before any institutionalism'.

The writings of Erasmus encouraged a liberalisation of orthodox teaching on divorce and remarriage among reformers at a time when there was much dissension in the Catholic Church. Though the Church resisted and finally rejected the reformers' teachings, the "exceptive clause" and "Pauline privilege" theories ultimately found their way into the Protestant creed. Similar views are extant in the Christadelphian Brotherhood today. They certainly do not owe their existence to original Christadelphian thought. Erasmus himself never forsook the Catholic Church to join the Reformation though he has been called its 'greatest scholar'. His teachings were designed in his view to further the interests of the Church by assisting the unfortunate and unhappy among its members. Though he died a broken and disappointed man, his views are still alive and well today, firmly entrenched in Protestant creeds and encouraged by evangelical fervour. For a detailed survey of the historical background refer to an article entitled "Marriage Relationships", Logos vol.51, August 1985 pg.350. But should we not reject any connection with Catholic teaching on divorce and remarriage purely for that reason alone?

'Authorities' say that the absolute prohibition on remarriage in the early 'church' can be traced back to writings around AD 150, well before the full development of the Catholic harlot system. Catholicism is an enormous counterfeit brought into existence by the corruption of the true Ecclesia. If the Catholic church Position on divorce is a carry-over from the early ecclesia as suggested by early writings, then there must be a reason for it that was to the advantage of the Church. In fact that is the case. The Catholic Church regarded marriage as a sacrament to be administered only by the Church. This was a method of control over subject peoples, and by maintaining the ban on divorce and remarriage this control was enhanced. The self-interest of the Church was always paramount in determination of a doctrinal position. However, if its adoption as a tenet of the Catholic Church is in itself a reason to reject it, then to be consistent we must reject all other practices of the Church as well. Catholics were also required to marry only other Roman Catholics. Should we abandon the principle that Christadelphians may only marry inside their own community simply because it is a Catholic practice? Or should we cease to require attendance at the Memorial table because the Catholic Church requires its members to regularly attend Mass? Obviously we choose to reject Catholic teaching and practice where it is scripturally incorrect and insupportable (as it almost invariably is). It is purely emotive reasoning that argues otherwise. And unfortunately there is no more emotive issue in the Brotherhood than that of divorce and remarriage. It is one area where genuine feelings of compassion can weigh heavily against rational and scriptural thinking. The possibility of humanism coming to the fore is far more likely in this issue than in any other which may afflict the Brotherhood.

Humanism is the great scourge of modern society. It is a disease that is already entering into the Brotherhood like a plague. We need on this issue, as on all others, to ensure that our views are not formed by tradition (external or otherwise), or by feelings of compassion for the unfortunate, but by the pure teachings of the Word of God alone. Hence, there is a vital need for a very careful examination of the so-called "exceptive clauses" and other problem passages.

### **The Early Christadelphian Position**

Should any think the above is a reflection on the Pioneers because of their understanding of the 'exceptive clauses' the obvious needs to be stated - none of the writings of Dr. Thomas or Robert Roberts contain any tendency towards humanism (much of course to the contrary). But where are their expository writings specifically on the subject of divorce and remarriage? Snippets only can be produced, and then mainly in brief answers to correspondent's questions. Can a full exposition of the marriage and divorce texts be produced from the Nineteenth Century Christadelphian library which reveals that early Christadelphian views on the exceptive clauses had been fully tested? What would our pioneering brethren do and teach today if they lived in the Noahic days which have descended on us? We can only speculate on this, but we can be assured that they would have been compelled to write more extensively on the question than they did.

A spirited defence of the Pioneer's expositional writings is an urgent necessity in our times when their sound and proven expositions are so often called in question by modern expositors, especially in the area of prophecy. But defenders of the early Christadelphian position on divorce which evidently permitted remarriage in certain rare cases where adultery had ended a marriage, are at a loss to produce a full expositional treatment of this subject by the Pioneers. To insist upon 'traditional purity' in the absence of these writings is unacceptable in a community which has so often been riven by contention over this matter. What is needed is individual diligence to take a closer look at exactly what these disputed Scriptures do say. Not infrequently interpreters seem to accept at face value the existence of an "exception clause" permitting divorce for adultery, and then use it as a basic premise upon which to build an exposition. A closer look reveals that such a premise does not really exist.

In examining these sensitive texts it is essential to allow the Spirit's choice of words to govern interpretation. To achieve this we must carefully examine both the original language and the context in which it is used. And moreover we must be certain that whatever construction we place on words or a context is in complete harmony with the teaching of the rest of Scripture. The Pioneers themselves of course always counselled that this should be so, and would not have had it any other way.

## CHAPTER SIX

## CHRIST'S FUNDAMENTAL TEACHING

Christ's teachings on divorce and remarriage are to be found in Matt.5:31-32; 19:3-2; Mark 10:2-12; and Luke 16:18. On three different recorded occasions he spoke on this subject. The first during the discourse on the mount; the second in dispute with the Pharisees recorded in Matt.19 and Mark 10, and the third in condemnation of the hypocrisy of covetous Pharisees (Luke 16). The "exceptive clause" passages (Matt.5:31-32; 19:31-2) will be considered in detail in a subsequent chapter. It is our purpose here to examine the two contexts which are 'uncomplicated' by insertion of an "exceptive clause", in order that we might ascertain the Lord's fundamental teaching. These are Mark 10:2-12 and Luke 16:18.

It would appear that both Mark and Luke wrote for a predominantly Gentile readership and that their omission of reference to an "exceptive clause" is related to that fact. However, it is not sound reasoning because of this to suggest that Christ laid down one rule for Jews and another for Gentiles. The most that can be said is that Matthew's inclusion of the so-called "exceptive clauses" in a gospel record evidently for a predominantly Jewish readership was to specifically address the vexed question among Jews of Deut.24: 1 and the supposed grounds for divorce it provided. Christ's teaching revealed the real motivation behind most divorce to be 'adultery' and its consequences to be adultery as well. But because Gentiles (for whom Mark and Luke wrote) had no interest in a peculiarly Jewish debate over the interpretation of Deut.24:1, no reference is made to an 'exception', which as we shall discover, was not an exception to a rule, but an exception to the adulterous motivation that attempted to use

Deut.24: 1 as a justification for unwarranted divorce. On the other hand, it is just as incorrect to argue as some have that the "exceptive clause" (which is alleged to be an exception to a rule) should be read into Mark 10 and Luke 16, as though this would change the fundamental sense. There is no doubt Christ said the words recorded in Matt.19:9 in the course of his dispute with the Pharisees also recorded by Mark. But why did Mark omit them? Why also does Luke 16:18 make no mention of an exception? These are the questions we must answer.

### **Mark 10:2-12**

Confronted by the Pharisees tempting him to again assert his unequivocal prohibition of divorce that they might charge him with contradicting Moses, the Lord pre-empted his interlocutors by asking, 'what did Moses command you?' Though Matthew's account is somewhat different, the essence of what may have been a more extended discussion is recorded by both. The issue in dispute was Rabbinical interpretation of Deut.24:1 as opposed to Christ's outright prohibition of divorce. The Pharisees claimed a permission in Moses' words, but Jesus rejoined that there was no permission by Moses, only a recognition of a hardness of heart which insisted on divorce. Then he asserts that his prohibition of divorce is in total harmony with God's principles established in the beginning, and reaffirms that divorce was never envisaged as part of the divine principles of marriage. To divorce is to sunder what God made "one flesh". There the dispute with the Pharisees ended according

to Mark. No mention is made of the "exceptive clause" passage of Matt. 19:9 which must have been spoken some time during the debate that Mark records.

The reason for Mark's omission of it is quite simple and is suggested by the nature of subsequent discussion "in the house ...of the same matter" (vv. 10-12). The Lord's private instruction of his disciples adds a new element which is not found anywhere in Matthew. Having repeated the substance of Matt. 19:9 that a husband putting away his wife without cause "commits adultery" (but significantly this time adding the words "against her" to emphasise the point), he goes on in Mark 10:12 to speak of a woman divorcing her husband and remarrying! This was quite foreign to Jewish law which being based on Deut. 24:1 only provided for the husband to obtain a divorce. But it was a familiar Gentile practice, hence its inclusion here. So it can be seen that Mark's primary reason for recording this incident is to bring before Gentile readers Christ's teaching on divorce and remarriage. He is not concerned with the issue of grounds for divorce which interested the Pharisees, so he omits the words "for every cause" from the leading question that began the dispute (cp. Mk. 10:2 and Matt. 19:3). Nor does he wish to limit his account of Christ's words to that particular form of adulterous motivation which Rabbinical interpretation of Deut. 24:1 encouraged in Jews, so he omits reference to the so-called "exceptive clause" because the purpose of that was to highlight the existence of improper and immoral motivation in most cases of divorce under Jewish law. The Spirit's singular concern through Mark is to emphasise the essence of Christ's fundamental teachings on divorce and remarriage. The prohibition on both is absolute, and its application universal. It involves Jew and Gentile; husband and wife, and this to the extent that even if one should be compelled to divorce by law or custom, remarriage is out of the question. To seek remarriage to another is always regarded as adulterous.

There was no repetition of the "exceptive clause" in the house to the disciples because it was entirely unnecessary. This is obviously because the disciples were satisfied on the question of grounds for divorce but still uncertain about the question of remarriage. This harmonises with their earlier exclamation that "if the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" (Matt.19:10), to which the Lord replied with the counsel of abstinence where necessity required it. Divorce without remarriage was an entirely new concept to the Jews. No one questioned the right of divorcees to remarry. But Christ's teaching cut right across this tradition, and they were shocked by it. He left them in no doubt however that remarriage after divorce for any reason was adulterous.

The Greek word translated "committeth adultery" occurs twice here and is also used twice in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9. MOICHAOMAI signifies to have unlawful intercourse with another's wife; to commit adultery with. It occurs here in the Present Indicative tense denoting action in progress in present time. Should one "put away" their spouse (the verb APOLUO here being in the Aorist Subjunctive suggests a condition or supposition that this might occur -- the reason not being specified), then remarriage to another is an act of adultery. The conditional nature of this statement is confirmed by the opening words OS EAN - Lit. "who if", which might be more plainly rendered, "if anyone". The fact that the Spirit chooses a verb "committeth adultery" in the Present Indicative to describe the result of remarriage is of the utmost significance. Though Mark does not record the words found in Matt. 19:9 the very tense selected in the Greek is silent witness to the Lord's teaching there. Adultery

begins in the heart and may culminate in divorce and remarriage. This is also portrayed here by the use of the Present Indicative as a continuous action throughout the whole process of divorce and remarriage. The physical adultery is but the culmination of that progressive action.

Summarising Christ's teaching here we might paraphrase his words this way: "If anyone, Jew or Gentile, male or female, believer or unbeliever (for the Pharisees were such), divorces their spouse and marries another, they are committing adultery in that whole process." That is, where divorce is undertaken for the purpose of remarriage it is always adulterous.

The universality of this rule is difficult to deny, but some demur on the grounds that because the Lord only has in view here (as in Luke 16:18) divorce on grounds other than adultery, the "exceptive clause" providing (as is alleged) for divorce and remarriage for adultery alone may be inferred. This argument might have some force if the so-called "exceptive clauses" were exceptions to a rule, but this they are not as we shall demonstrate later. However, any objective reading of Mark 10:11-12 must conclude that Christ embraces all divorces which end in remarriage. If ever there was a demand for an 'exception' to avoid misleading his disciples, if we are to believe that there is one justifiable ground for divorce and remarriage, then it is here. But it cannot be found and we have suggested the reason why. This point will be developed further in the study of Luke 16:18.

Another question arises from Christ's teaching in Mark. When remarriage after divorce occurs, do the participants involved in adultery live thereafter in a state of adultery, requiring their separation before their repentance can be accepted as a basis for association among believers? This is a vital question which must be addressed. It arises because the tenses used in Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:18 indicate the action of adultery in progress in present time. Some have suggested that this indicates that adultery is continuing through the duration of the second marriage. Is this correct? The answer has been suggested above, but let us now develop it in a consideration of the very similar words of Luke 16: 18.

### **Luke 16:18**

At first reading this verse appears to fit rather uncomfortably into the context of Luke 16. Yet closer examination reveals just how appropriate Christ's reference to divorce and remarriage was in this context. The series of parables which he spoke in the hearing of two classes: "publicans and sinners" and "Pharisees and scribes" (Luke 15: 1-2) was deliberately fashioned for his audience. The former like sheep were lost outside the house (Luke 15:3-7). Their plight and its cause was further amplified in the parable of the prodigal son who wasted his father's substance on riotous (or lustful) living. However, the elder son of this parable, though never leaving the house was nevertheless lost inside it because of covetousness, hence the choice of a coin to represent his case in the previous parable (Luke 15:8-10; 11-32). The Pharisees who were covetous and hypocritical like the elder son are then exposed even further by the motivation of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1-12). The pursuit of temporary gain was destructive of single-minded service (Luke 16:13). How the Pharisees must have been stung by this exposure of their true motivation! They certainly perceived that he spoke of them for "they derided him" (v.14). But the Lord rejoined by demonstrating the nature of the hypocrisy which concealed their covetousness. They

justified themselves before men by using God's law and their stewardship of it to vindicate their actions which were vile before God (v.15). However, a new teaching had arrived which fulfilled and superseded the Law of Moses, and not one abiding principle of God's law through Moses would fail to be represented by it.

Then follow the words concerning divorce, for this was the most obvious and harmful example of Pharisaical covetousness "justified" by misapplication of divine law. The use of Deut. 24: 1 to provide grounds for divorce was universally accepted among Jews. Whether those grounds were restricted to sexual sin or widened to include "any cause", the motivation for divorce was all too often the desire for remarriage, and this was a right that all men divorcing took for granted. It was this covetous motivation for temporary gain and present fleshly satisfaction that Jesus condemns.

The import of verse 18 is extremely plain. "Whoever" is the Greek PAS signifying all; every one; any one. Employed in the singular, masculine, nominative case it points to the subject class who divorce for the purpose of remarriage, Among Jews this was always the man. Doubtless many culprits in this crime now stood before Christ. His words embrace them all, and any who might follow their example. Then two participles occur in the text: GAMEO ("marrieth" twice) and APOLUO ("putteth away") which are both in the present tense, nominative case, singular, masculine, and active voice in order to describe and govern the action of this covetous man.

Firstly, a word of explanation on the grammar may be fitting. A participle combines the function of a verb and an adjective. That is, it is a descriptive word with a verbal function. The present tense refers to action in progress. The nominative case points to, or nominates the subject; namely, the man here divorcing. Therefore the present participle simply defines its subject as belonging to a certain class who do the action denoted by the following verb, This is also why the active voice is employed. A literal rendition of the opening phrase of this verse would be, "Every one that divorces." The grammar excludes alternatives such as, "Every one that is accustomed to or habituated to divorce", or "Every one that has divorced", for it speaks of action in progress. The A.V. read in this light is a fair translation.

The verb MOICHUO ("committeth adultery") occurs in the singular, Present Indicative tense. This tense points to a matter of fact stemming from action in progress in present time. Used in this durative sense where action is linear or progressive the obvious conclusion to be drawn from the context is that Christ is teaching that the whole process of divorce for the purpose of remarriage is adulterous. The sexual covetousness which led the Pharisees into divorce that they might marry another is thus pointedly condemned, but in the process so is divorce where there may be 'good' grounds, if the purpose of such divorce is the desire for remarriage. This conclusion is inescapable, and is borne out by the second part of Christ's law in this verse.

Any one marrying a divorced woman is also committing adultery. The participle APOLUO ("her that is put away") is in the singular, feminine, passive voice, and perfect tense. The tense points to completed action; the passive voice to the subject of the action. Hence, the woman is the victim or subject of divorce as an accomplished fact. Nothing is said about the reason for the divorce, although the context is the covetousness of the Pharisees who in



many cases put away their wives "for every cause". No exception for justifiable grounds is made. Yet these words were not only spoken to Pharisees but to disciples as well (Luke 16:1). Surely if there was such an 'exception' its repetition here was obligatory. But No! There is only a condemnation of remarriage. Another man taking to wife a divorcee became an adulterer regardless of the reason for her dismissal.

Some have asserted that because in this passage a man and his wife both commit adultery by remarriage, that it is a fair deduction that neither of them had committed adultery before their divorce. Therefore the question of divorce for adultery is not addressed here. They conclude that this passage refers only to unwarranted divorce and that the "exceptive clause" is expressly inferred. There is no doubt that Christ is here dealing principally with divorce resulting from sexual covetousness, but there are three reasons why this assertion must be questioned:

(1 ) Firstly, adultery was the cause of divorce, in one sense. "Any one divorcing and remarrying is committing adultery" is the literal sense of Christ's words. The man's covetousness was the mark of his adultery. His remarriage was simply the physical evidence of an existing moral fact. His adultery was progressive and not therefore limited to the act of remarriage.

(2) Secondly, the wife's moral status is not specifically addressed in this verse. It may be inferred from the final words that she was involved in adultery by remarriage, but Christ is chiefly concerned with the status of the man who marries her. It is he who commits adultery against the first husband. The woman is simply presented as the subject of divorce; no reason for her dismissal is indicated. Whether she was the victim of Hillelite or Shammaite permission for divorce is of no interest to Christ in this passage, for his sole concern was the motivation of men who were divorcing for the purpose of remarriage and using God's law to justify it.

(3) Thirdly, there is no 'exception' to Christ's absolute prohibition of divorce and remarriage, as we shall discover in our next study. Hence, such a permission could not be inferred here.

### **Is Adultery a Continuous State?**

Turning now to the question of whether or not remarriage after divorce places one in a state of continuous adultery we need to revert to the grammar. The Present Indicative tense of MOICHUO ("committeth adultery") denotes action in progress in present time. Blass/Debrunner in "A Greek Grammar of the N.T. and other Early Christian Literature" state concerning this tense, "The action is represented as durative and either as timeless, or as taking place in present time, including of course duration on one side or the other of the present moment." As always, the context must be the final arbiter in determining the intention and function of the grammar, which may be very helpful in confirming an interpretation. It will be immediately observed that the grammar confirms our previous exposition, namely, that adultery commences with the thought process leading to divorce for the purpose of remarriage. It was progressive or continuous through to the actual remarriage. So the Present Indicative tense which can be timeless or open-ended on either side in its duration is admirably suited for use here. It will be obvious from the preceding remarks which side of the action in this case is open-ended.

The same principle of interpretation may be applied to the identical word used in the second case, ie. of a man marrying the divorcee. His adultery is also progressive, inasmuch as

intention to marry a divorced woman, according to divine law is adulterous in concept and then later in fact, because she is another man's wife.

The suggestion that remarried divorcees continue to live in a 'state of adultery' throughout the duration of their marriage may be questioned on a number of grounds. These are:

(1 ) The context concerns "covetousness". In particular sexual lust which leads men to divorce for the purpose of remarriage. Christ is dealing with the process, not the moral status of the new marriage. He simply demonstrates that all remarriage is predicated on adulterous considerations.

(2) The grammar does not require us to interpret "committeth adultery" as a continuous state after remarriage. If the context is allowed to govern the function of the grammar, then it will be seen that the latter gives added force to Christ's meaning. If we were intended to understand the adultery to be continuous it is probable a different tense would have been employed. The perfect indicative expressing an existing state resulting from past action, or the imperfect of repeated action might have been employed to convey this meaning.

(3) It has been pointed out that to press this suggestion creates a 'tension' in Christ's words because married people do not commit adultery in the course of normal marital relationships. This tension is removed if we understand adultery to be the basis of the marriage, not the state in which it continues. There seems little doubt that this is Christ's meaning.

(4) Nowhere in Scripture are remarried divorcees commanded to separate from their new partner as a basis of repentance or admission to fellowship. This is a condition required by some who interpret Christ's words here and elsewhere as indicating that such are living in a 'state of adultery' or continuous sin. On this premise repentance may only be demonstrated by abandonment of the sin of adultery through separation. Surely if this was absolutely essential for salvation it would have been required by express commandment in view of the endemic nature of the problem among both Jew and Gentile in Christ's day. It would not have been left to supposition based on what is a doubtful premise.

Adultery is a grievous sin that will exclude from the kingdom if unrepented of. Those who come to the truth in the divorced and remarried state must acknowledge this as a basis of repentance before baptism. Most ecclesias accept such without the demand for separation, citing Paul's counsel in 1 Cor.7:17-24. The sin of adultery can be forgiven but the fact of marriage cannot be changed. A similar principle may be applied to those who sin in knowledge. Their case of course involves either weakness or misunderstanding and in some cases presumption to break divine law. The latter is a sin that God has always harshly punished in the past. Only total repentance indicated by genuine contrition, public acknowledgment of guilt, and repudiation of divorce and remarriage would suffice as a basis of restoration to fellowship. Where offenders maintain the propriety of their actions no basis for restoration exists. Even where there is a basis, it may be considered imprudent to allow full restoration to fellowship without an extended trial period to ensure genuineness. No action should be taken which might diminish the seriousness of divorce and the sin of adultery involved in remarriage. Separation may not be required as a condition of restoration to fellowship, but limitations must be applied. At the very least ecclesial office and responsibility must be denied for the sake of example (1 Tim.3:2,12; Titus 1:6).

The only commandment inferred here is that divorcees must not remarry (cp. 1 Cor. 7:10-11). If they do, adultery is committed. However, there is little to suggest in these words of Christ that a 'state of adultery' persists thereafter, especially if the sin is repudiated by a change of heart and genuine repentance. This is indeed one of the most vexing issues in the entire divorce debate and we will need to ventilate it more thoroughly once all the relevant principles have been established. Refer to Appendix 1.

(5) If our understanding of a 'one flesh' relationship is correct the new marriage, though founded on adultery, is nevertheless an actual relationship. 'One flesh' simply refers to a family unit or kinship relation created by marriage. The former relationship may have been "put asunder" but it has not been dissolved, hence adultery is committed by remarriage. However, the new marriage also brings into existence another family unit, and this should not be broken regardless of its adulterous foundations. Furthermore, divine law precludes return to a divorced and remarried wife where the man has rejected her (Deut. 24:1-4), so recovery in this situation is not a basis for separation either. The realities may be recognised, but the sin of adultery must never be tolerated or justified.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

We conclude from Luke 16:18 that Christ taught the following:

- (1) In all cases divorce for the purpose of remarriage is adulterous in concept and origin.
- (2) Remarriage after divorce or to a divorcee is an act of adultery.
- (3) These principles are universal, governing all men.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

**THE "EXCEPTIVE CLAUSES"**

The so-called "exceptive clause" occurs in two separate texts - Matt.5:32 and 19:9. Having established the Lord's fundamental teaching on divorce and remarriage we can now turn and carefully examine these two contexts in detail. We will find on close examination a beautiful harmony between his teaching recorded in Matthew with that recorded by Mark and Luke.

**THE DISCOURSE ON THE MOUNT**

While our study is primarily concerned with the Lord's teachings on marriage and divorce, it is necessary to examine briefly the context in which his earliest teaching on the subject is found. The discourse on the mount is the most concentrated and far-reaching statement of Christ's teachings available to us in the gospels. When he had ended his sayings "the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes" (Matt.7:28-29). The foundation principles of the kingdom of God had been set forth, and in the process the ignorance, insincerity, and inadequacy of the traditional upholders of the Law fully exposed.

Christ came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it (Matt.5:17-18). His concern was for the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" grievously misled by the example of those who sat in Moses' seat (Matt.23:2-3) who by reputation championed the Law, but in practise denied its true spirit and power. Often the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees undermined the Law altogether, thus endangering the eternal welfare of many (Matt. 5:19-20). The Lord sets out to reveal the righteousness that 'exceeded' the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. In doing this he not only "fulfilled" the Law but surpasses it, for his 'law' is a law of the heart which seeks to govern human motivation from within as the basis of attaining that 'righteousness' which leads to eternal life.

In Matt.5 the Lord makes an assault on six contemporary views on vital aspects of the Mosaic Law. He largely quotes the wording of the Law itself knowing that his audience would understand the precepts of Moses in the traditional manner taught by the scribes and Pharisees (Matt.5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). Proceeding to lay down his own 'law' with an authoritative and transcendent "But I say unto you", he sweeps aside the traditional understanding of the Law and the Rabbinical perversions which had been imposed upon it and arrives at the true perfection of his Father in heaven that men should seek to emulate (Matt.5:48). It must be understood that Christ was not simply restating the Mosaic legislation in another form in search of its true spirit and intention. Indeed, he gathered that up and went beyond to lay down a new law of the heart! "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseseth into it" (Luke 16:16~, he was to say later: and this when speaking of covetousness in the matter of divorce and remarriage. Again in that place he pointed out that not one 'tittle' of the Law would fail. That is, his principles not only upheld the Law, but superseded it. The Law was holy, just, and good ~Rom.7:12), and its principles capable of guiding men in divine paths, but as a national code it had its limitations, though these were offset by the preordained scope of its operation - it was an effective "schoolmaster" to lead men unto Christ

(Gal.3:24). When Christ came he focused his teachings on the heart, and individual motivation, and not on rituals and externals, whereas the Law by its very legislative nature sought to regulate men's actions principally by ordinance, precept, and prohibition.

We should bear these things in mind when pondering Christ's words concerning divorce and remarriage in the discourse, and take particular note that his teaching on this subject is bounded on either side by his teaching concerning 'adultery in the heart' and the integrity of oaths (the keeping of one's word and promises). The relation of these to marriage is obvious.

## **CHRIST'S TEACHING ON ADULTERY, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE**

### **Matthew 5:27-32**

Because of the obvious connection between Christ's words on adultery and divorce, it is necessary to consider the context from Matt.5:27-32 as a whole, and in order to focus on detail we shall do this in a verse by verse manner.

### **Verse by Verse Notes**

#### **Verse 27**

"Thou shalt not commit adultery" - The phrase is cited from Ex.20:14 and Deut.5:18. The "righteousness" of the Pharisees (v.20) confined the Law to external acts. They avoided the appearance of adultery while allowing indulgence in thoughts and deeds which were tantamount to the same thing. The Law in fact did address the cause of sin. Though a national code it was not only concerned with externals and rituals. Its spirit and intention penetrated beyond actions to inner motives as well (Rom,7:7; Ex.20: 17; Deut.5:21), but this had been ignored or misunderstood by the majority of God's people. Jesus in his teaching demonstrates here that the act contemplated is tantamount to the act committed. This was a dramatic departure from Rabbinical teaching with its emphasis on external deeds and ceremonial rituals.

#### **Verse 28**

"lust after" - EPITHUMEO to fix the desire upon, to have the affections directed towards. This word is employed for that intense desire which seeks to possess its object. This is the lust of contemplation and nurtured desire, and is not primarily a reference to the unbidden thoughts that involuntarily and continually arise from within every son of Adam. These the servant of God must instantly dismiss with a brief and violent struggle in the mind lest they should become 'fixed desire'. These involuntary thoughts only become fixed desire (EPITHUMEO) when cultivated and nurtured. Failure to immediately suppress natural carnal thinking will inevitably lead to the sin of EPITHUMEO.

The Lord stresses a vital principle the fountain of the act is the thought leading to it. Every contemplated deed has a motive, and every motive is a potential deed. We are guilty of the act of adultery against our spouse if we indulge it in the mind by lustful contemplation directed towards another.

The context concerns adultery and its true source. Jesus then shows in vv. 29-30 by a series of figures that the deeds of the body must be controlled in the mind--at their source.

**Verse 31**

"It hath been said" - This introduction differs to those in which reference is made to "them of old time" (5:21, 27, 33) because unlike those occurrences, what follows is not intended to be an exact quotation of the Law, but rather an allusion to Mosaic legislation in the form in which it was understood by the Rabbinical schools of Christ's day. Our studies have shown that Moses gave no permission, nor supplied any grounds for divorce in Deut.24:1-4. He did not say "let him give", only "and he give". Thus he 'suffered' an existing practice, but he did not introduce a new one. The Rabbis were responsible for turning Moses' words into a permission for divorce, and it was they who taught what follows in the balance of this verse. The only dispute among the Rabbinical schools concerned grounds for divorce, not the legitimacy of divorce. The school of Hillel allowed divorce and remarriage for almost any cause at all, while that of Shammai rated unchastity (sexual impropriety) as the only lawful basis for dissolution. The right to remarry after divorce was universally accepted and was not in dispute.

The Pharisees viewed Deut.24:1 as a "command" by Moses to put away a wife (Matt.19:7). This was a dreadfully improper reading of his words, for the only command in the legislation is a ban on remarriage of the original partners. It is clear therefore, that Christ represents the contemporary understanding of Deut.24:1 here, and is not citing the exact wording of Moses' law.

Should any demur from this conclusion they should ponder verse 43 as well. Where does the Law say that the Israelite should hate his enemy? Yet Jesus appends that statement to an obvious quotation from Lev. 19:18. It is thought that the phrase "hate thine enemy" may come from Deut.23:6 which in speaking of Ammonites and Moabites says, "Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever." But consider the very next verse in which hatred of Edomites or Egyptians is strictly forbidden (Deut.23:7). Here was another case of Rabbinical perversion that had become traditional teaching, and so the Lord represents contemporary views of the Law in the language employed by the teachers of that time.

"whosoever shall put away his wife" - There is nothing in Deut.24:1 that approximates this phrase. Moses spoke of one man (selected as a example of hard-heartedness) and concentrates upon him in order to lay down an inflexible prohibition against remarriage in verse 4. He is not concerned with laying down a general rule for the conduct of divorce cases or with providing grounds for divorce. However, the Rabbis had interpreted it that way, hence the use of this phrase.

The Greek word for "shall put away" is APOLUO - to free fully; i.e. to relieve, release, dismiss. It is clearly used in this context of a dissolution divorce permitting remarriage (this being the purpose of such divorces among the Jews).

"let...give" - The word DIDOMI to give; preceded by the word "let" in the A.V. is a correct translation in this context, for Christ intends in the next verse to over-rule this Rabbinical permission for divorce. As we have pointed out, there is nothing equivalent to 'let' or any other permission in the Hebrew of Deut.24: 1.

"a writing of divorcement" --- The purpose of a bill of divorce under Jewish law was to signify the dissolution of the marriage and permit remarriage by both parties. An essential element of the 'writing' was the declaration: "Behold, thou art permitted unto any man." Our studies have shown that this was not the purpose for which God used the figure of a bill of divorce in Jer.3:8.

### **Verse 32**

"But I say unto you" -- This direct statement of authority reveals that what is to follow will be something vastly different to standard Rabbinical teaching and transcendent even of the Law itself. In each of the six cases cited in this chapter Christ's principles supersede the Law. His words are not an explanation of what the Law taught. He goes beyond that to lay down a new law of the heart. This must be obvious to any careful reader. Why then do so many try and make this verse simply an explanation of Deut.24:1? In every other case Christ exceeds the Law in the process of revealing contemporary misunderstanding and perversion of it. Why should his teaching here be different, and be relegated to a mere explanation of what Moses taught? No; this like the rest of his sayings is precept involving the heart and must be understood in that vein.

"that whosoever" - By this phrase Christ includes all those who might exercise Rabbinical permission to divorce that he has alluded to in V. 31.

"shall put away" - Gr. APOLUO. The same word used in verse 31 signifying to release, let go free, or send away. It clearly speaks of divorce in this context.

"his wife" - GUNE - a woman. Often used of a wife. It should be noted that Jesus says nothing in this context of a wife divorcing her husband. He is dealing with Jewish Rabbinical law which only recognised the right of the husband to divorce. A woman's only access to divorce was to force a situation upon her husband which he might use as a basis for divorce. To the Jews adultery was always a sin against the husband by the wife (note the absence of the offending man in the case of John 8:3-4). Hence, in this context the matter is confined to men divorcing their wives. This is entirely appropriate, because Christ is still talking about the sin of adultery to which he had referred in verses 27 and 28, and in this he focuses on the man.

"saving for" - PAREKTOS - Near by without, out near; out of, without, besides (Bullinger). Interlinear Bible - "apart from". The word only occurs 3 times in the N.T. The other occurrences being Acts 26:29 and 2 Cor.11:28. Consideration of its use there reveals that it speaks of something outside or apart from, yet closely associated with one. It has been rendered "except for", which is reasonable, although its more basic meaning is probably "apart from" or "besides". The important issue is that we should recognise its use here as pointing to a cause or reason that may not have entered the considerations of one divorcing his wife, and not as an exception to the rule prohibiting divorce. The word is used to point to a man's thinking, not his wife's sin. It occurs as a preposition here with the genitive case (the case expressing origin, possession, or relation) and is similarly employed in Acts 26:29 ("except"). The other occurrence in 2 Cor.11 :28 ("without") is as an adverb. A preposition is a word placed usually before a noun or its equivalent to mark some relation. In the geni-

tive case it points to a matter of origin or possession. That is, the origin or possession of the reason leading to divorce in this case. Hence its use as a preposition to govern the relation of the phrase LOGOS PORNEIAS ("the cause of fornication") to the putting away of a wife is not to be seen as providing an exception to Christ's basic prohibition of divorce, but as an exception to the subjective consideration itself of the question of divorce in the mind of a man. The context makes this clear. The whole point of this discourse was to advance from concentration on external deeds and focus upon what went on in the minds of men leading to those deeds. Adultery in the heart is Christ's theme in these verses (V.27-32). Men must 'pluck out' and 'cut off' in the mind those thoughts and motives which might lead them to the grievous sin of divorce for adulterous considerations. The only basis upon which they could be free of the charge of adulterous motivation in dealing with their wives was if an altogether external factor to their own inward motivation had governed their considerations--namely serious persistent sexual misbehaviour by their wife. It is fitting therefore that the Spirit should then select the word LOGOS to represent the "cause" or reason for this externally prompted consideration. Christ spoke in Hebrew (Matt.27:46; Mk.7:34), but we can be assured that the Spirit's choice of words in Greek is just as precise as his in Hebrew.

"the cause" - LOGOS - the (spoken) word; the expression of the thoughts of the mind in doctrine, prophecy, etc.; by extension the reason (as demanded or assigned by the mind). R.S.V. - "the ground of". Diag. - "on account of." Being in the singular number and genitive case its use here is to indicate a singular reason (namely 'fornication') which should be fully and subjectively known to the man considering putting away his wife if he is to escape the charge of adulterous motivation. Because LOGOS has reference to the activity of the mind expressed in a cause, ground, or reason for action, it is clear that the phrase PAREKTOS LOGOS PORNEIAS (all in the genitive case) qualifies the verb APOLUO ("put away") and speaks of the origin or possession of the motivation leading to divorce. Its reference is to the thinking of the man, not the past actions of his wife. It is also for this reason that the non-specific term PORNEIA ("fornication" or sexual immorality) is used instead of the very specific term MOICHEIA (adultery). The Lord is not concerned with a specific sin on the woman's part, but with the considerations in the mind of a man which lead to divorce. Only the known fact of sexual sin by his wife could free him of the accusation that his motivation for divorce was adulterous.

The use of LOGOS in this phrase thus implies the need for absolute certainty in a man's mind that his wife had actually committed serious sexual sin against him, lest by putting her away for any other reason but that fact he be guilty of adulterous motivation, and also become responsible for her subsequent adultery. It must be pointed out clearly that Jesus is not counselling men to put away their wives for the cause of fornication, but is plainly repudiating and condemning a common practice among the Jews--the arbitrary putting away of wives for the flimsiest of reasons, sometimes doubtless on the mere pretence or suspicion of unfaithfulness. The Lord is not commanding or even suggesting to men that they should put away their wives for any reason, but is dealing both with the source and consequences of the appalling evils that flowed from a widespread and common practice of the day encouraged by Rabbinical tradition.

"fornication" - PORNEIA - fornication; illicit sexual intercourse. Our study of this word has shown that it applies to sexual sin in general, including adultery. It appears to be a word



implying persistent or habitual sin. Some render it "harlotry" and others "immorality". There is no question that it is to be understood in a wide and general sense. The selection of such a broad term is quite deliberate, for the Lord has not been concerned with nominating the exact sin of the wife; his sole concern is the basis of a man's motivation for divorce.

"causeth her to commit adultery" - Roth. - "causeth her to be made an adulteress." The word "causeth" is POIEO - to make, produce; to cause, be the means of a thing. In the active voice, present tense, and indicative mood here it points to a matter of fact that is the direct responsibility of the man putting away his wife. The word is often rendered "bringeth forth" and consequently its use here is very significant. Jesus had begun his discourse on adultery in verse 28 by showing that the true source or cause of adultery was the human heart. Now he goes to show that those who looked upon another woman with lustful desire and used Moses' words as justification for divorce of their wives for the purpose of remarriage had not only already committed adultery in the heart, but would be held guilty of compelling their rejected wives into adultery as well. This she could do by herself 'lusting after' another man (v.28) or by remarriage. The evil of divorce would then be further compounded by the involvement of at least two other people in the same sin - the man's new 'wife' and his divorced wife's new 'husband'. Thus at least four people committed adultery due to the loose and incorrect interpretation of Deut.24: 1 which encouraged men to indulge in adultery (first in the heart v.28, then in fact).

In summary, the context deals with the cause of adultery, not a justification for men to put away their wives for "the cause of fornication". That this is the case is made very clear by omitting the so-called 'exceptive clause' from the reading of verse 32. If these words are to be regarded as an exception to a rule, then the basic rule should still be plainly understood on omission of the one exception. It would thus read "whosoever shall put away his wife, causeth her to commit adultery." Nothing could be plainer than that! The only exception to this, that is, the only basis on which a man could escape this charge would be if his wife had already committed adultery against him. If as was required by Jewish law he had put her away for that sin, then he could be free of the charge of causing her to commit adultery, but nowhere here, or in the N.T. is he encouraged to put away his wife, even if such a sin has occurred. The Lord is simply recognising the realities of the circumstances under which his disciples lived. Jewish and Roman law required the putting away of a wife who had committed sexual sin against her husband. If putting her away could not be avoided Christ would not hold the disciple guilty of "causing" adultery for that was already a fact. But he left the way open for recovery by forbidding remarriage for both parties. This is our next consideration.

"whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery"--The word "divorced" is again APOLUO - to (be) put away; set free, released. The comprehensive term "whosoever" embraces all who may seek to marry a divorcee for whatever cause she may have been divorced. This is the undeniable conclusion reached from any objective consideration of the final statement of this verse. The Lord has not been dealing with appropriate grounds for divorce, but with the real cause and consequences of divorce for which a man may only escape responsibility if the cause is with his wife. However, regardless of her guilt or innocence in the matter, should she be put away, she was not free to marry another without being guilty of adultery (i.e. against the original husband). This is generally accepted as true

in the case of a woman put away for a reason other than "fornication", but not so readily accepted by those who contend that adultery breaks the marriage bond and paves the way for a dissolution divorce that frees both parties for remarriage (or at the very least the innocent partner). But where in this passage or in any other does Christ commend remarriage to the innocent partner? The fact of the matter is that he is silent on this point because the implication of his closing words is that the original marriage bond is not dissolved whatever the cause of divorce.

If divorce for adultery dissolves the marriage completely so that nothing remains of the original relationship, then there should be no impediment to remarriage by either partner. Why then does the second 'husband' commit adultery against the first husband? Surely only because the woman is still regarded as the former husband's wife! And if she is still his wife, how can he marry another even if he was innocent of the 'cause' of divorce?

If as we have shown the phrase PAREKTOS LOGOS PORNEIAS is not an exception to the rule forbidding divorce, but an exception to improper motivation for divorce, then this reasoning is given added force. This is because the Lord is not focussing on any particular sin in the woman, but on what transpires in the mind of the man. He does not nominate a particular sin for which she must, or might be divorced. Hence, suitable grounds for divorce are not considered here. The fact is, if she is divorced for any reason, a new marriage is adulterous.

Consequently, we may paraphrase Christ's teaching in this verse as follows: "Whosoever shall divorce his wife apart from knowledge of sexual sin in her, does so from adulterous considerations and is guilty of compelling her to commit adultery in the heart or in reality; and whoever marries her that is divorced for any reason also commits adultery against her first husband".

### **THE ERASMIAN THEORY CHALLENGED**

There are a number of reasons why the 'remarriage after divorce for adultery' theories based on the exceptive clauses must be wrong. Chief of these is the fact that they contradict the plain teaching of the scriptures and especially of Christ himself (Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16: 18; Matt.19:4-6). But there are other reasons just as fatal to those theories provided by the tests of contextual congruence and simple logic. We shall apply these tests.

#### **The Contextual Congruence Problem**

The Lord's treatment of six matters of traditional perversion of the Law in which he exceeds "the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees" culminates in verse 48 with the appeal, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." If as we are led to believe by some that Christ taught that divorce was allowable where adultery had occurred, and remarriage was permitted to the offended partner, then his teaching in Matt.5:32 reached no higher than that of the school of Shammai which received the support of some scribes and Pharisees. Such would have been immediately perceived as support for one of the rival schools of Rabbinical thought. Was this the "perfect" standard laid down by God in the beginning? Are we to accept that Christ upheld his Father's perfection by allowing an exception to the original divine standard?

### **Illogical Application of Matthew 5:32**

If with Erasmus we suppose that 'divorce' in Matt.5:32 means the complete dissolution of the marriage, the logic of this statement seems defective or at least unfair. For on this understanding Matt.5:32a means that divorce with the right to remarry is only valid if the wife commits the particular sin of adultery. Yet in other situations that result in divorce neither party can remarry as the unconditional statement of Matt.5:32b declares. Now if the sin of adultery results in the complete dissolution of the marriage, that allows both parties, the adulterous wife and the innocent husband, to remarry! It is manifestly absurd to allow a woman divorced for adultery to remarry, but to deny this right to a woman divorced for another reason.

This absurdity may be alleviated if one supposes that the divorced adulteress is refused the right of remarriage, but the innocent husband may remarry (= Erasmian view). But this is effectively to allow polygamy! For if the woman cannot remarry she is not technically divorced, but separated. The marriage bond with her husband still exists: that is why remarrying a divorced woman is adultery (5:32b). Thus her former husband is really becoming a bigamist if he takes a second wife since the marital bond with his former spouse has not been dissolved. The interpretation we have made leads to no such contradiction. In no case is there the right of remarriage. Immorality may necessitate separation but not remarriage: in every case remarriage involves adultery.

Consider another breathtaking illogicality in the following application of Christ's words. Taking his words in the general sense as having application to all cases of marital unfaithfulness, suppose a marriage breaks down and the husband commits adultery (this is supposed to be the ground for the 'exceptive clause' to be invoked).

(1) If the husband decides to divorce his wife (she being the innocent party), then it follows that (according to those who allow divorce and remarriage) she is caused to commit adultery if she remarries! This means plainly she cannot remarry: if she did so, she would be guilty of adultery.

(2) On the other hand, if she learnt of her husband's adultery, and then sued for divorce on that basis (which is however not the right spirit), and she "put him away", then she would be free to remarry (because she would be implementing the exceptive clause).

Thus, in the first instance, if he divorces her, she cannot remarry but, if she first divorces him, then she can remarry! Consequently, the anomaly is created that, the one that gets in first to divorce the other, is the one better off for remarriage, The matter is totally unequal because it arises out of a wrong concept of Christ's teaching on divorce.

### **SUMMARY OF CHRIST'S TEACHING IN MATT. 5:32**

(1) A husband divorcing his wife for any consideration other than her known sexual sin may be guilty of adulterous motivation, and certainly is guilty of compelling his wife into adultery against himself.

(2) The phrase "saving for the cause of fornication" is simply a matter-of-fact recognition that if the wife has already committed adultery, her husband cannot be held guilty of driving her into it by divorcing her. She is responsible for the sinful adulterous connection, not he.

(3) Matt.5:31-32 is an expansion of Christ's application of the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." This is the second of two examples which Christ's audience would not have regarded as violations of that commandment. The first was lust (vv.27-30); the second, divorce (vv.31-32).

(4) The sin of adultery is committed by the husband who improperly contemplates and then carries through divorce; by the rejected wife who contemplates and then ultimately indulges remarriage; by her new husband; and by anyone marrying the man who began it all.

## **CHRIST'S CONTROVERSY WITH THE PHARISEES**

### **Matthew 19:3-12**

#### **Introduction**

Only Matthew records the "exceptive clauses" spoken by Christ on two separate occasions. It is characteristic of Matthew's gospel to mention a topic twice, indeed to quote a saying twice. See for example 3:2/4:17; 3: 10/7: 19; 5:29-30/18:8-9; 13:12/25:29. This suggests that the exception clauses, "except for immorality", ought to be understood in the same way in both passages even though the Greek is slightly different. We shall find this to be so.

Some texts and translations suggest that Matt.19:9 is in fact virtually identical to 5:32. The following is a list of the alternative texts:

Westcott and Hort - "without a reason of unfaithfulness (lit. harlotry) causes her to be made an adulteress and he that marrieth the divorced woman committeth adultery" (see Rotherham mgn.).

Vatican Manuscript - "on account of whoredom, causes her to commit adultery: and he who marries...."

R.V. (margin) - "Some ancient authorities read - - saving for the cause of fornication maketh her an adulteress: as in 5:32."

R.S.V. (margin) - "Other ancient authorities, after 'unchastity', read 'makes her commit adultery'."

If these texts were accepted as correct it would be unnecessary to comment at length on Matt.19:9. But we shall proceed on the basis that the text employed in the translation of the A.V. is correct. We shall find that the meaning of Christ's teaching is the same in both places, but that the emphasis in each case was slightly different. In both cases Jesus condemns the adulterous motivation of men who used Moses' law to justify divorce for the purpose of remarriage. The difference lies in the emphasis placed on the consequences of divorce for the participants.

The reason for Matthew's duplication of the "exceptive clause" is to be found in the purpose of his gospel record. Matthew wrote principally for Jews and portrays Jesus as Israel's Messiah and King, coming to fulfil the many Old Testament prophecies concerning Messiah. Because he wrote for Jews it was essential that he include the Lord's discourses concerning the fallacious and destructive interpretations of Moses' words in Deut.24: 1 by the Rabbinical schools of the day which so much influenced the lives of Israelites. The latter

desperately needed clear and unequivocal direction on the subject of marriage to overturn in their minds the distortions of the Rabbinical schools which were widely practised. On the other hand, Mark and Luke who record the same discourses omit reference to an "exceptive clause". They did so because their narratives were written principally for Gentiles who, not being under the Law, were not concerned by false views on Deut.24:1. Thus the Spirit through Mark and Luke elected to record only the words of the Lord which were relevant to Gentiles. If the "exceptive clause" was intended to be a universal course of action in cases of unfaithfulness, then Gentile converts who might have only ever read Mark or Luke were kept in ignorance of its existence. This could not be so. The simple fact is that there never was an "exceptive clause" permitting divorce and remarriage, only a succinct phrase to summarise the motivation of an adulterous mind influenced by perverted Rabbinical tradition.

### **THE "EXCEPTIVE CLAUSES"**

The context of Matt.19 like that of Mark 10 concerns the theme of discipleship and that obedience to divine commandments which springs from faith. A contrast is drawn between those who "follow" Christ with childlike faith in his promises for the future (19:12,14,21,27-28; 20:7), and those who live by law for present advantage (19:3,7,16-22; 20:2,10-16). The former "receive" his sayings (19:11) and deny themselves, the latter assert the claims of law and seek to use it for their own temporal advantage. That the disciples understood Christ to forbid remarriage after divorce for any reason (19:10) is proof that his words in verse 9 were neither a qualification of verses 4 to 6 nor a simple explanation of the meaning of Moses' law. He did not repudiate their suggestion but rather reinforced it with the counsel of self-denial. Thus his statement beginning, "And I say unto you" was calculated to dispose of the spirit of law-keeping which motivated the Pharisees and led them to wrongly employ Deut.24: 1 in order to justify divorce for the purpose of remarriage. Much previously written on Matt.5:27-32 is also relevant here and need not be repeated at length in the following verse by verse notes.

### **Matthew 19:3-12**

#### **Verse 3**

The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him. Whether these Pharisees were of the school of Hillel or of Shammai cannot be determined with certainty, although it is probable they were of the former. However, it does not matter because their purpose in asking the question that follows was to tempt Jesus to repeat his earlier teaching on divorce and remarriage so that they might accuse him before the "multitudes" (v.2) of contradicting Moses. This is why their question begins, "Is it lawful for a man....?" They had in mind Deut.24:1 and Jewish tradition based on that 'law' (refer pages 37 & 38).

'put away' - APOLUO to let loose from, loosen away from, let go free. The same word occurs in vv.7,8,9; Matt.5:31,32. Its meaning is 'divorce'.

"every cause" - PAS - all. AITIA - a cause, origin, ground. This is a reference to the teachings of the school of Hillel, that a man could put away his wife for almost any reason, perhaps even including preference for another woman.

**Verse 4**

"Have ye not read" - When the negative particle OU occurs in a question, as it does here ("not"), the expected answer is always 'yes'. They had read all Moses' words, yet had clearly misunderstood Deut.24: 1-4 and as Christ shows completely ignored the import of Gen.2:24.

"he which made them at the beginning" - This phrase assumes great importance in this exchange because Jesus repeats it in v.8. To combat the distortions imposed upon the law of Deut.24:1-4 there was a need to return to the principles established by God at the beginning of all things.

"made them male and female" - To state this seems unnecessary for it is axiomatic, yet the words are cited from Gen.1:27 in order to emphasise that in the beginning God by a creative act made one man, and one woman out of that man, who being truly and uniquely 'one flesh' were joined in marriage. Thus was established the basis for all subsequent marriages. The strength of this quotation is that in the beginning there was only one man and one woman joined as 'one flesh' - divorce was unthinkable, and divorce for the purpose of remarriage an absurdity.

**Verse 5**

"And said" - i.e. God said what follows, on the basis of His creative act. Jesus adduces the words of his Father from Gen.2:24 to teach the fundamental principles of marriage. The marriage relationship is a divinely appointed institution and no man has the right to sever into two what God has made one. Although Adam and Eve experienced a unique relationship due to the creation of Eve from Adam's own flesh, their posterity who marry are also deemed to be 'one flesh' relations when joined together in the bond of a marriage covenant sealed by union. In this 'one flesh' relationship they become a new family unit sharing an unbreakable kinship relation for life.

"cleave" - PROSKOLLAOMAI - to join fast together, to glue, cement; to cleave unto. This is not a reference to sexual union but to the indissolubility of the family relationship established by marriage.

"twain" - Roth. "two". (Refer to notes on page 12).

"shall be one flesh" - The Greek for 'shall be' is ESOMAI in the plural, future indicative; signifying to become a fact in future time. Adam and Eve were 'one flesh' from the moment of Eve's creation: their posterity become 'one flesh' relations by marriage. This is proof that Gen.2:24 refers to all marriages subsequent to that of Adam and Eve in whose unique relationship the principles of marriage were established.

**Verse 6**

"Wherefore they are no more twain" - This statement confirms the above interpretation.

"What therefore God hath joined together" - "Joined together" is the word SUZUGNUO - to yoke together (the only other occurrence is in the companion account - Mark 10:9). This is a key word in the context because it explains the meaning of "one flesh". In marriage a male and a female from different families are yoked together into a new family unit which takes

priority over all other family relationships. They each become the other's closest relative and are deemed by God to be "one flesh" after the pattern of Adam and Eve who were actually of the same flesh. Adam and Eve were one by a creative act; their posterity are yoked by a divinely appointed relationship through marriage. This is why the Lord said, "What God yoked", and not "Who God yoked". The preposition in the singular neuter points to the 'one flesh' relationship not to any particular participants in marriage.

"let not man put asunder" - KORIZO - to put a space between, put apart, separate. The word occurs here in the singular, present tense, imperative mood, and active voice. The imperative mood supplies force to the command, "let not"; while the singular number and active voice point to the direct action of any man who being a constituent of a 'one flesh' relationship attempts to put a space between what God has yoked together as one. The commandment is emphatic. Men are expressly forbidden to break the marriage relationship.

There has been much discussion on the question of the indissolubility of marriage. It is undoubtedly proper to assert, as many have done, the indissolubility of marriage based on Christ's words in this passage, for this is plainly their import. But some have countered by saying that though man should not "put asunder", the fact is, this does occur. And, it is said, in some cases (e.g. adultery) divorce and remarriage are justifiable (hence the addition of the "exceptive clause" v.9). This interpretation is clearly a grave error. However, there is an element of truth in this second position. The proponents of this view suggest that the command, "let not man put asunder", is of itself implicit proof that marriage can be sundered. Their view is that it is possible to separate what God made 'one flesh'! Obviously men do break marriages and by remarriage create new marriages. Those asserting the indissolubility of marriage rejoin that the original marriage persists in the divine sight and the new marriage is an illicit union. It has also been thought by some that this new union places the participants in a permanent state of adultery. What is the answer to this problem?

Clearly, the issue of indissolubility requires careful analysis. Firstly, what is it that is indissoluble? The state of marriage as a partnership and a sharing relationship with all its attendant responsibilities is plainly not indissoluble. Men do break marital partnerships and covenants by separation and divorce and consequently any viable association between two people which might properly be called a marriage ceases to exist. What is indissoluble however, despite all the efforts of men to terminate a marriage is the 'one flesh' family or 'blood' relationship established by the original marriage. This we have seen is not created solely by, or dependent on the continuance of a sexual relationship (Adam and Eve were 'one flesh' long before any sexual union). What God joined together in Eden was a male and a female, as man and wife, in a family unit or kinship relation that was closer even than the relationship that exists between parents and children.

For this cause a man would leave father and mother in order to give priority to a transcendent family relationship. However, just as his 'leaving' father and mother does not sever or dissolve his family relationship to them, so divorce does not dissolve the family relationship created by marriage. The marriage partnership might be broken and even 'legally terminated' by divorce, but the 'one flesh' family relationship remains intact. Only death dissolves a family relationship. Consequently, remarriage in the lifetime of a former partner is always incipiently adulterous in the divine sight.

Men may create realities but they cannot alter the facts. New marriages by divorcees do create new 'one flesh' family relationships and may even be recognised as totally legitimate by society at large and in some cases by the Brotherhood, but this does not alter the fact that their foundation is adulterous because the original 'one flesh' relationship persists in God's sight. Some may ask, "Can a man have more than one 'one flesh' relationship? The answer is clearly 'yes' if 'one flesh' is understood simply to refer to a family or kinship relation. This may be duplicated as it was by those in Old Testament times who practised polygamy (seemingly without stated divine condemnation in their dispensation), but that same relationship cannot be dissolved by divorce. The divine standard has always been, one man and one woman yoked together for life and where men have failed to meet the demands of this standard by such practices as polygamy they have had to suffer the consequences of that abuse. Divorce for the purpose of remarriage is the ultimate abuse of the divine standard.

### **Verse 7**

"Why did Moses then command" - The prepared question which the Pharisees waited to hurl at Christ was seriously flawed. They regarded Deut.24: 1 as a virtual "command" by Moses to divorce. The Lord immediately rejoins that far from being a commandment or even a permission to divorce, Moses' precept was a sufferance of hard-heartedness. That same hard-heartedness was now evident in the Pharisees who used his precepts to justify divorce and remarriage.

"divorcement" - APOSTASION - defection, desertion, departure from. Roth. - "repudiation".

### **Verse 8**

"hardness of your heart" - SKLEROKARDIA - hardness of heart. This is an exclusively biblical word (because only God truly knows man's heart and can so write of it - man does not see himself as hard-hearted - witness these Pharisees!). Note the curious use of the same word in the Septuagint for Deut.10:16, and Jer.4:4 ("foreskin of your heart"). However we may choose to interpret Deut.24:1, one fact is clear from these words; Moses' law was designed to deal with fleshly hard-heartedness and insensitivity to divine principles, not provide a justification for divorce even on 'legitimate' grounds as some suggest adultery may be.

"suffered" - EPITREPO - to turn upon, direct upon; to commit or entrust to any one; give up, yield, allow. The word does not signify permission, but merely sufferance or toleration. Moses' law was a concession to hard-heartedness and nothing more. No grounds justifying divorce were provided. His purpose was to limit and regulate divorce by impressing the finality and consequences of divorce upon those who insisted on the right to dismiss their wives. If a difficulty is seen in this: that God would allow such a contravention of His principles, perhaps consideration of the reason why polygamy and slavery were not also outrightly banned will assist. Divorce for the purpose of remarriage was an economical form of polygamy. Prohibition of one without the other was virtually pointless. God's toleration of these practices of men did not however constitute permission or justification. This is the import of Christ's next words.



"but from the beginning it was not so" - Both the R.V. and Young's Literal translate, "but from the beginning it hath not been so"; giving proper emphasis to the grammar. Divorce was not a part of the divine standard from the beginning and has never been "permitted" or justified since, notwithstanding its toleration under the Mosaic constitution. Christ's absolute prohibition of divorce is perfectly consistent with his Father's standard. On two occasions the Lord refers to the principles established in Eden in order to refute the suggestion that there were any proper grounds for divorce and remarriage. It is inconceivable that his next words should provide an exception to that rule as some contend.

### **Verse 9**

"And I say unto you" - The Lord now carries the matter a step further. What were the consequences of their misuse of Moses' law? Again his commandment is to be transcendent both of tradition and of the Law as it had been in Matt.5:32.

"whosoever shall put away his wife" - APOLUO is the verb used here to speak of divorce. In the subjunctive mood and active voice the word indicates the probability of divorce on the basis cited. It was a familiar practice among Jews.

"except it be for" - Omit the words "it be" in italics. The Greek words are ME EPI -Lit. "not for" or "not upon". The particle ME expresses a dependent and conditional negation, i.e. depending on the idea, conception, or thoughts of some subject, and therefore subjective. In other words, the use of the negative particle ME here instead of OU which simply states an objective fact, shows that the subject (the man putting away his wife was conscious that his wife was not guilty of "fornication". He is portrayed as knowing full well that his wife was innocent of any sin against him.

For a demonstration of the manner in which the Spirit has employed the two negative particles ME and OU consider Matt.22:11-12 and refer to Bro. J. Carter's exposition of "Parables of the Messiah" pages 156-157. The use of OU in Matt.22:11 to state an objective fact is matched by the use of ME in verse 12 to state a fact subjectively known. That is, the offender knew that he was inappropriately attired for the wedding feast, yet had entered regardless. The use of ME again in Matt.22:29 also illustrates that the Sadducees were more than simply ignorant of the scriptures; they were willingly ignorant of them! This sense of the word must be taken into account in 19:9.

The word EPI signifies upon the ground of. Thus this phrase "except it be for fornication" which would be far more accurately rendered "not for fornication" is added not as an exception to a rule, but to specify the exact conditions under which the men in question (Pharisees of the school of Hillel) sought to put away their wives. The followers of the school of Hillel and the proponents of his teaching who encouraged putting away of wives "for every cause" (v.3) had introduced a pernicious and destructive influence into the domestic fabric of Jewish national life and there were doubtless many who had put away their wives for considerations other than fornication on her part. In many cases for the flimsiest of reasons that they might be free to "marry another". It was this adulterous motivation of those who divorced their wives "for every cause" that Christ here condemns. A man divorcing in the absence of considerations of sexual sin by his wife could only have one object - a desire for a new partner; and that was adultery (Matt.5:28).

The inclusion by some texts of the word EI ("if") before the phrase ME EPI PORNEIA does not affect this interpretation. The emphasis is still upon the motivating considerations in the mind of a man.

"fornication" - PORNEIA - illicit sexual intercourse. Refer to notes pgs. 34-35 and 55-56. The broad term signifying immorality is employed instead of MOICHEIA (adultery) because the Lord is not attempting to specify a ground upon which a wife might be divorced. His subject is the hard-hearted motivation of men who dismissed their wives for "every cause" knowing there was no sexual sin in her. Previously in Matt.5:32 he had taught that the only basis on which a man could escape the charge of adulterous motivation in putting away his wife was if she was already guilty of serious sexual sin (thus requiring her dismissal under Jewish law). But his teaching here is aimed straight at the terrible misuse of Deut.24:1 by the school of Hillel advanced in verses 3 and 7. Hillel's "every cause" included the most trivial of grounds to justify divorce and were obviously a thinly veiled pretence to be rid of one woman in order to marry another. A man acting under the compulsion of Jewish law to dismiss an adulterous wife might be excused, but an adulterer at heart so acting for his own satisfaction was condemned. However, in every case remarriage was adultery, hence the next words.

"and shall marry another, committeth adultery" - The difference here with Matt.5:32 is that the focus is on the consequences of divorce and remarriage for the man divorcing: in particular, the man using "every cause" as an excuse for so doing. His motivation and the act of adultery involved in remarriage is thus outrightly condemned. However it is clear that where "fornication" had resulted in divorce, remarriage was still adultery. The negated prepositional phrase, "not upon fornication" qualifies the preceding verb APOLUO ("shall put away") and not the following verb GAMEO ("shall marry"). This is true in an overwhelming majority of cases where similar phrases are used in the N.T. Hence the very syntax of the Greek suggests that the qualifying phrase applies only to "putting away" and not to remarriage. Had the Lord intended to provide permission for an offended party to divorce and remarry, the qualifying clause would most likely have been placed after both verbs. Then Christ's words would read something like this: "Whoever puts away his wife and marries another, if it is not for immorality that he puts her away and marries another, commits adultery." This would be a real exceptive clause permitting divorce and remarriage for one cause, but Christ does not say this. Allowance is made for the possibility of "putting away", but not remarriage. The Jew who found himself compelled to dismiss his wife for sexual sin could not remarry. It was this total prohibition which elicited the stunned response of the disciples in verse 10.

That this is the meaning of Christ's words is borne out by the closing words of the verse.

For notes on the word MOICHAOMAI ("committeth adultery") refer to pages 35 and 44.

"and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" - There are no qualifying phrases in this case. Any woman put away for any cause at all was not an acceptable partner for another man. He committed adultery if he married her. The reasons for this are obvious. She was still another man's wife regardless of the reason for her dismissal. And if this was

the case, then divorce even for adultery on her part had not dissolved the first marriage. That being so, neither the innocent husband or the guilty wife were free to remarry without adultery resulting.

### Verse 10

"His disciples say unto him" - The disciples of Jesus had listened intently to this exchange because doubtless their minds too had been influenced by Rabbinical thought on the subject of divorce and remarriage. It seems his earlier teaching in the discourse on the mount had not been fully appreciated by the disciples and it is possible that some of them were not present at that time. His categorical prohibition of divorce and remarriage and the condemnation of those who followed the teaching of the Rabbinical schools deeply impressed them. The ramifications of this new teaching loomed large in their minds and they instantly responded to it. Perhaps theirs was a typical over-reaction, but Christ does not repudiate their response as misunderstanding; he explains that acceptance of his teaching depends upon attitude of mind towards the things of the kingdom. The response of the disciples and Christ's reply is the crowning proof that there was no "exceptive clause" in the Lord's words. If there had been, then their response is inexplicable and the Lord's reply virtually meaningless.

"case" - AITIA - is the same word for "cause" v.3.

"it is not good to marry" - Why? Because on the basis of the Lord's words there were no grounds for divorce and remarriage. There was no way out of a poor or broken marriage. The disciples were struck by the ramifications of this, and so reason that it would be better not to marry at all if a man had no liberty to put away his wife for any cause and remarry; and furthermore would even be held guilty of causing adultery in others should he do so!

Mark records that the disciples later questioned Jesus on the same matter while "in the house" (Mk.10:10-12). It is obvious that they were still in a quandary over his earlier remarks concerning remarriage. His reply was quite direct and without qualification - any man or woman putting away their spouse (for any reason) in order to marry another commits adultery.

### Verse 11

"All men cannot receive this saying" - The word 'receive' is CHOREO - to give space, make room for; is used metaphorically of receiving with the mind. The word 'cannot' is the particle OU, a word that expresses a negative objective fact. It actually begins the phrase in the Greek which should literally read, "not all make room for this word (LOGOS)." Hence Rotherham translates, "not all find room for the word", and the Diaglott, "none can admit the word." The Lord is stating plainly that hard-heartedness (v.8) prevents some from making room for his word. The "saying" in question is undoubtedly that of verse 9 prohibiting remarriage after divorce.

"save them to whom it is given" - The word 'save' is ALLA and simply means "but" (Diag.). The word 'given' is DIDOMI, a commonly used word signifying to give, present; hence to deliver, supply. Roth. - "to whom it hath been given". Not all men make room in their minds to receive the word, but for those who do is 'given', not only an understanding of Christ's

teaching, but the faith to humbly submit to it. The carnally minded and hard-hearted reject his teaching because it is not to their liking, or seek to pervert it because it stands in the way of their chosen course.

The suggestion that Jesus taught that not all men were capable of receiving his teaching, i.e. some are not given the ability to remain unmarried where a marriage has broken down) because some men "burn" (1 Cor.7:9,10, and should therefore be permitted to remarry, is clearly erroneous. If such was the Lord's intention then he contradicted his own teaching in verse 9 that remarriage produced adultery. This cannot be so.

### **Verse 12**

"eunuchs which were so born from their mother's womb" - This may refer to those born with physical deficiency, or may be a reference to those who are hereditarily inclined to celibacy. Their situation is intrinsic and unchangeable.

"made eunuchs of men" - Castration was widely practised in the ancient world to produce totally committed servants. Consequently, they were often found as advisers or body-guards (Dan.1:3-5,18-20; Gen.37:36 mgn; 2 Kings 9:32). Again their condition was unalterable.

"made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake" - This particular class of eunuchs comprises two groups who have had to make the same choice. Namely, men like Jesus, John the Baptist, Paul and others who chose celibacy for the sake of labours associated with the Kingdom of God, and others who chose not to remarry following the departure of their spouse so that they might attain to that kingdom.

The contrast drawn between the two former classes and this class is obvious. The former had no choice in the matter. Their situation was unchangeable. However, this class had a choice and made it in favour of higher issues pertaining to the kingdom. The attitude of accepting his teaching without question as "little children" would lead men to this choice (v.14).

"He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" - Roth. - "He that is able to find room, let him find room."

### **PROBLEMS OF THE ERASMIAN INTERPRETATION**

As in the case of Matt.5:32, the view that Christ allows divorce and remarriage for adultery alone in Matt.19:9 is unable to withstand two critical tests. These are contextual and linguistic consistency.

#### **The Contextual Congruence Problem**

A real problem with the Erasmian interpretation of Matthew's account of the Lord's controversy with the Pharisees is the contextual incongruency that arises at two points. First, Matthew 19:3-12 begins with the Pharisees asking Jesus about possible grounds for divorce (v.3). They assume the then dominant Hillelite position. Jesus responds with an absolute prohibition of divorce based on his exposition of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 (vv.4-6). The Pharisees immediately appeal to Deut.24:1 to refute the prohibition of divorce which Jesus had derived from Genesis (v.7). Jesus rejoins by interpreting that Mosaic writing as a mere

concession to the Israelites' well-known obduracy and wilful disobedience to God's revealed will. Then he adds verse 9: a precept that supposedly prohibits divorce and remarriage except where immorality has occurred. In a discussion of the Hillelite view, Jesus ultimately appears to side with the Shammaites! Shammai allowed or demanded divorce in the case of unchastity, basing his views on Deut.24:1. Yet Jesus has just unambiguously said that that text has no bearing whatsoever on his teaching on divorce and remarriage. In the Erasmian view verse 9 does not belong naturally with what precedes, because verses 4-8 do not discuss grounds for divorce at all. If the Erasmian view is accepted then it is almost impossible to escape the fact that Jesus is contradicting himself.

Secondly, the amazed reaction of the disciples (v.10) is proof that the Lord had not adopted the position of Shammai but had gone beyond it altogether and prohibited remarriage under any circumstances. His eunuch saying is final confirmation of that (v.11-12).

### **The Problem of Linguistic Consistency**

The Erasmian interpretation makes Jesus use the word "put away" - APOLUOI in two different senses in verse 9. This makes Jesus enunciate two propositions in one sentence: (1) Putting away for unchastity plus remarriage does not equal adultery; (2) Putting away for other reasons plus remarriage equals adultery. In the first case, since remarriage does not constitute adultery, putting away obviously dissolves the marriage completely as traditional Jewish divorce always did. But in the second case 'putting away' cannot have this significance, for the marriage bond must still exist since remarriage involves adultery. The result is semantic confusion about the meaning of 'put away' when the Erasmian view is adopted.

The interpretation we have advanced allows APOLUO in verse 9 to be given the same meaning in both instances.

### **SUMMARY OF THE "EXCEPTIVE CLAUSE" PASSAGES**

We have seen that Matt.5:31-32 is an expansion of Christ's teaching concerning the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (5:27-30). Most cases of divorce) under Jewish tradition were adulterous in motivation. Jesus allows that some were not, hence the phrase, "saving for the cause of fornication". Where immorality had disrupted a marriage a man could be free of the charge of adulterous motivation should he be compelled by Jewish law to divorce his wife. However, dismissal in the absence of sexual sin multiplied adultery.

Matt.19:3-9 reinforces three points that are implicit in Christ's teaching in Matt.5: (1) Divorce is wrong and is not in harmony with divine principles established in the beginning; (2) Divorce for the purpose of remarriage is always adulterous; and, (3) Remarriage following divorce or to a divorcee is an act of adultery. Again, the Lord allows for the possibility of a marriage being disrupted by immorality but forbids the thought of remarriage. His teaching here is significantly bounded on either side by the command to forgive trespass "seventy times seven" (Matt.18:21-35) and a call to celibacy where a marriage could not be recovered (Matt.19:11-12).

## 1 CORINTHIANS 7

Many errors can be avoided in the interpretation of 1 Cor.7 if we first establish the overall structure of the section, and identify the various groups of individuals that the Apostle Paul addresses.

**OVERALL STRUCTURE**

Beginning with chapter 7:1, the Apostle employs structural markers throughout the remainder of the Epistle to signify change of subject as he progressively deals with matters about which the Corinthians had written to him. The words 'epi de' ("now concerning") occur in Chapter 7:1,25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1,12, while 'de' ("now") is found introducing a new subject in Chapter 10:1; 11:2; and 15:1. It is vital to recognise these markers in Chapter 7 in order to avoid confusing Paul's answers to two separate issues concerning marriage. Verses 1-24 constitute his reply to a number of questions concerning the propriety of sexual relations in marriage, and the consequent status of mixed marriages . On the other hand, verses 25-38 constitute his answer to a question concerning 'virgins' (ie. those never married, but amongst whom there were some engaged to marry during a time of distress for the Brotherhood.) It will be necessary for us to establish this segregation of classes as we proceed, but if it is indeed correct, the resulting outline of Chapter 7 would be as follows:

**Vv 1-24 DIRECTIONS TO THE MARRIED AND THOSE FORMERLY MARRIED**

- Vv 1-7 The ascetics answered - instruction on Marital duties.
- Vv 8-9 Advice to Widowers and Widows to abide unmarried.
- Vv 10-11 Christ's command to the Married - Divorce and Remarriage prohibited.
- Vv 12-16 The status of mixed marriages and the responsibilities of believing partners.
- Vv 17-24 The governing principle - Remain in the situation of life in which the Truth is found.

**Vv 25-38 DIRECTIONS AND ADVICE TO THOSE WHO HAD NEVER MARRIED****Vv 39-40 SUMMARY - THE LAW OF MARRIAGE RESTATED****THE THEME OF THE CHAPTER**

The apostle himself pauses in the middle of his reply to the Corinthians' questions on marriage to provide the overriding principle governing his teaching on this subject.

Verses 17-24 provide that all pervading principle:- "But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk.....Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God". In each segment of his reply to the Corinthians the apostle emphasises the rule:- 'Do not change the circumstances in which one comes to the Truth or those which may subsequently arise, except in those cases where sin will be avoided absolutely'. His advice is:- "ABIDE AS YE ARE" change may result in sin, therefore only change where sin will be avoided absolutely.

Note the following examples of this theme:-

- Vv. 2-5        Continue sexual relations in marriage so as to avoid fornication.
- Vv. 7-9        The bereaved not to remarry except where self-control cannot prevail.
- Vv 10-11      Remarriage after separation forbidden - only change in order to achieve reconciliation.
- Vv 12-16      Continue within mixed marriages and fulfil responsibilities - the believer may have to suffer separation enforced by the unbeliever.
- Vv 18 -19      Do not change circumcision or uncircumcision.
- Vv 21-23      Do not seek release from slavery - only change to improve service to Christ.
- Vv 25-38      It is good for the unmarried to remain in that state, but marriage is not sin.
- Vv 39-40      Marriage binds for life - death releases for remarriage, but change is inadvisable.

### **"PAULINE PRIVILEGE"**

This is the title given to the alleged Apostolic permission provided by Paul to deserted and divorced believers allowing remarriage . That such permission does not exist is evident from both the context and the words employed by the Apostle, not to mention the overwhelming weight of scriptural testimony already considered . It has been asserted that the apostle oscillates between Christ's commandments on the one hand, and his own advice on the other throughout the chapter, and that a contrast exists between Christ's limited but definite laws and Paul's more extensive Apostolic advice. Christ is said to have confined his teaching to marriage in the Truth where both partners are either believers or responsible to Divine Law, while it is left to the Apostle to offer advice to those involved in mixed marriages: ie. advice which, it is alleged, includes the right to divorce and remarry where continuation of the marriage is impossible.

Our previous studies have shown that these assertions cannot be correct and it will be necessary for us to critically examine them in our verse by verse consideration of this chapter.

### **INTRODUCTION TO 1 COR. 7**

The problems in the fledgling ecclesia were numerous indeed. Spiritual immaturity was manifest both doctrinally and morally and in this environment competing views on a range of issues produced some remarkable results. Extremes tend to beget extremes. The philosophical Libertines of Corinth with their catch-cry "All things are lawful" were matched by the puritanical rigorists who rejoined with their own slogan, " It is good for a man not to touch a woman!"

The extremity of this is not immediately perceived until it is realised that they meant by this that even married brethren should not "touch a woman" in order to be pure.

Paul, in his letter, dealt forcefully with the brazen folly of brethren who frequented the harlots' temple with scant regard for the consequences. He was no less forceful in his

treatment of the extreme views of the ascetics which jeopardised the continuity of marriages whether "in the Lord" or with an unbelieving partner.

So critical was this issue that it occupied first place in the systematic replies Paul gave to a series of questions addressed to him by the Corinthians. Perhaps this infers that it also headed that list of questions. Let us now examine Paul's answers.

## VERSE BY VERSE NOTES 1 CORINTHIANS 7

### Verse 1

"Now concerning" - 'epi de' - with this scriptural marker, Paul turns to address the questions put to him on specific matters in a letter from the Corinthians. Having silenced the boast of the Libertines ("all things are lawful") in Chapter 6, he now proceeds to deal with the ascetics who contended that sexual relations even in marriage were not good and should be avoided.

"the things whereof ye wrote unto me" - interpretation would be easier if this letter had been preserved, but it is not impossible to establish with reasonable accuracy the content of the questions posed by the Corinthians without it. Careful examination of the Apostle's reply is the key to this. It is vital to remember that Paul is addressing *special questions*, not simply discoursing on general matters concerning marriage.

"it is good for a man not to touch a woman" - this is clearly a quotation from the Corinthian's letter. It was doubtless a slogan of the ascetics developed in opposition to the Libertine slogans of Chapter 6:12-13 ("all things are lawful" and "meats for the belly and the belly for meats"). The latter saw no harm in "fornication" (6:13-18). The former were repudiating sexual relations altogether. Hence, they said it was not "good to touch a woman" at all. That they meant their own wives is obvious from vv2-5. The word "touch" is 'haptomai' - 'to attach oneself to, ie. to touch'. The word was used of setting something on fire by fastening fire to it. Thus its relation to sexual intercourse can be seen (cp. v.9 "burn"). Paul is not saying that it is good not to marry a woman, for this would make him contradict himself when he later says, 'so then he that giveth in marriage doeth well' (cp. v.38).

He agrees with the ascetics that where it is possible to refrain from marriage and thus avoid sexual relations altogether, that this is to be preferred (cp. vv. 7-8, 25-26, 32-38), but he totally disagrees with their assertion that married people should refrain from sexual relations for considerations of religious purity.

### Verse 2

"Nevertheless, to avoid fornication" - This is not a good translation of the Greek. The words are 'dia de tas porneias', lit. "but on account of fornication". The italicised words "to avoid" should be deleted. Paul directed the abstemious ascetics to the problem of fornication. Their liberal brethren saw no problem in exposing themselves to the danger of consorting with temple prostitutes (cp. 6:13-18), but these had gone to the opposite extreme and avoided sexual contact with their own wives, ostensibly to devote themselves to fasting and prayer



(cp. v.5). By so doing, they likewise exposed themselves to the danger of fornication. "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak", or to use Paul 's own words read 1 Cor 10:12-14. Abstention from marital duty was not only unnecessary, it was dangerous. Having previously married, these brethren had revealed their need for a wife (cp. v.7-9,37), now they regarded the demands of religious zeal to be incompatible with the baser needs of the body. Paul directs them in no uncertain terms to abandon such a view.

The word "fornication" - 'porneias' refers to sexual sin in general, including adultery.

"let every man have his own wife" - The Apostle cannot mean by this that every brother (and every sister) should get married in order to avoid sexual sin. This would contradict his teaching in Vv.7-8,25-26,32-31. Moreover the verb 'echeto' ("have") is in the present tense and imperative mood. This form of a verb expresses a command, advice, or request, ie. do something now, making these words even more incompatible with the command that follows if it is understood as advice to marry. Consequently, we must seek another meaning.

It is clear Paul uses "have" ('echeto') here in the same way he did in 1 Cor 5:1, where it cannot mean marriage, but the act of cohabitation. Reference to a lexicon shows the basic word 'echo' to have a wide usage, generally meaning to have, hold, possess, etc. The context must determine its usage in any place. 1 Cor 5:1 is quite obvious and so is its use here if we read vv.1-5 together as a context. Paul 's meaning in this passage could be paraphrased - "it is good if a man can abstain from sexual relations with a woman, but you are married; beware of fornication! Let husband and wife cohabit together and render the responsibilities of marriage without grudging or compulsion".

### **Verse 3**

"Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence" - The words "due benevolence" ('opheileo eunoia') signify the debt of kindness. 'Eunoia' comprises the words 'eu' - "well", and 'nous' - "the mind", ie. 'to be well-minded or considerate'). Some texts, however, only have 'opheileo' and translate "let the husband render unto the wife her due" (cp R.V., Roth). This obviously means 'the conjugal obligation' as it is rendered by the Diaglott. There are duties in marriage: one of these is to meet the sexual needs of one's partner. So also the wife is then instructed to give what is her husband's due. It must be remembered, however, that the Apostle is speaking in the context of deliberate abstention as opposed to normality in response to a question concerning religious zeal. He does not have in mind the many circumstances of life which may force or require temporary abstention from the conjugal obligation, eg. childbirth, illness, incapacity etc. Paul's command is not designed to be used in making unreasonable demands upon one's spouse.

### **Verse 4**

"The wife hath not power of her own body" - "power" is 'exousiazō' - to have or exercise authority. Diaglott renders this "controls" . This phrase seals the foregoing interpretation . Paul had begun in v.1 with the question of "touching" a woman. This verse demonstrates that his context is sexual relations in marriage. The woman does not have authority to refuse the needs of her husband, nor, as he goes on to say, does the husband have authority to deny his wife her physical needs.

**Verse 5**

"Defraud ye not one another" - The word 'apostereo' signifies "to rob, despoil, defraud, deprive of". Hence the Diaglott translates this, "Do not deprive each other". To refuse the duty of marriage on the grounds of scriptural responsibility and service to God, is in fact, robbery of one's partner! This would have shocked the lofty ascetics of Corinth, but, Paul does make one concession.

"except it be with consent for a time" - "with consent" is 'ek sumphonou' - lit. from or by agreement, from sun - with, and "phone" - 'a sound', thus in unison, accord, or agreement. Hence the Diaglott, "unless by agreement for a season". The word "time" is 'kairos' signifying an occasion, ie. a set or proper time. Where there is full and harmonious agreement between husband and wife to engage in spiritual exercise, sexual relations may be set aside, but only for a set time. Then they must "come together again.

"that satan tempt you not for your incontinency" - Paul began with a warning about 'fornication' (cp. v.2). Now he reinforces his point. Flesh is ever active, (within and without the body). Self-control is difficult enough without increasing the pressure for unnecessary reasons. Even well-intentioned ascetics are subject to periods of "incontinency". The word 'akrasia' means 'the character of one not having power over his passions; a want of self-control'.

**Verse 6**

"but I speak this by permission" - 'sungnome' signifies a "joint opinion, mind or understanding." Throughout this Chapter, Paul offers his spirit guided advice to the Corinthians on matters about which the Lord had given no commandment. In doing this he endeavours to be of one mind with Christ in determining his answers to their questions (cp vv 25,40). The concession he made in v.5 to allow abstention from sexual intercourse by agreement for a season is one such judgement which he believes the Lord would share, though no commandment was given by him on the subject.

"not of commandment" - Diag. "not as an injunction." The commandment had been given - "Let each render the other's due" (cp. vv.2-4). This was God's will concerning the function of marriage. Verse 5 is a concession only to be applied where there is mutual agreement to exclusively seek higher things for a season.

**Verse 7**

"every man has his proper gift of God" - Paul's wish is that all men had the self-control and singleness of purpose which enabled him to refrain from "touching" a woman (cp. v.1), and have no need for marriage (cp. 9:5). But every one has a proper ('idios' - "one's own, individual") gift ('charisma' - "favour kindness") from God. Paul's self-control came from the nature of his mission and the totality of his commitment to it. He counted that as a gift from God. He had "power to lead about a wife" but denied it for the work's sake. Others had different gifts from God. In the case of the abstemious ascetics of Corinth, one of their gifts from God was a believing wife (cp. Prov.18:22), and to her they had a conjugal obligation.

**Vv 8-9 ADVICE TO WIDOWERS AND WIDOWS**

### Verse 8

"I say therefore to the unmarried and widows" - following on from his expressed wish that all men should be like him, Paul now turns to address the question of the position of those who had been married but whose partners had died. This may at first appear to be a sweeping statement, but careful analysis leads to this conclusion. The "unmarried" men and widows of the ecclesia were just as concerned as those who were married, with the question, "Is it good for a man to touch a woman?" (cp. v.1).

The word "unmarried" is 'agamos' signifying "without nuptials, unmarried." It occurs only four times in the N.T., and all in this chapter (cp. vv.11,32,34) . The meaning of the word is simply "unmarried", yet Paul employs it of different types of unmarried. In v.11, he uses it of the wife who has been separated from her husband. She is still married because reconciliation with her husband is counselled, so its use in v.11 indicates a state in which one lives as though married, but is ineligible for marriage - ie. she is not to contemplate marriage to another.

In v.32 'agamos' is used of a man never married, for Paul 's theme there is "virgins" (cp. v.25,34-37). He uses the word again in v.34 of a woman who has never married. Hence, the particular nuance or shade of meaning Paul intends must be determined by context and grammar. It is the grammar which comes to our aid in v.8. Firstly, both the word for "unmarried" ('agamos'), and "widows" ('chera' = bereaved of her husband) are in the plural and dative case. By "widows", Paul obviously means women who have lost their husband in death, hence the article employed is in the feminine gender. However, the article preceding 'agamos' in the text is in the form which can only be masculine or neuter. Either Paul intended unmarried men solely or he chose the article in the neuter gender in order to embrace both male and female. Let us examine the context.

If Paul meant by "unmarried" both male and female who had never married, why did he add reference to widows only and exclude reference to widowers? If "unmarried" includes the never-married and widowers, why separate widows? If "unmarried" means all unmarried, why not include the separated or the divorced (v.11)? By such a process of elimination, it becomes clear that Paul uses 'agamos' in v8 to refer to brethren who had been bereaved of their wives. Thus we may accept the view of those who say that 'agamos' occurs here in the masculine gender and refers to widowers. There is a word in the Greek for widowers ('cheros'), but it does not occur in the N.T., or in the Septuagint. Reference to Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon reveals that 'agamos is used to denote both bachelors and widowers.

As we have seen, the grammatical parallelism of v.8 requires that "unmarried" refer only to widowers and not to any bachelor or single person. Paul's readers were considering answers to their specific questions and would have been in no doubt as to his meaning .

"it is good for them if they abide even as I" - if the preceding conclusion is accepted, this statement would confirm what many believe:- that the Apostle Paul was himself a widower (cp. Acts 6:12; 7:58; 8:1 with Freeman's "Bible Manners and Customs" page 388). Marriage was regarded as a solemn duty by Law-abiding Jews (cp. Edersheim "Sketches of Jewish Social Life" page 147). A Rabbinical precept declared that a Jew who had no wife was not a

man. It is very likely that Paul was married before his call to the Truth, but that he had lost his wife at some stage. This speculation is of little consequence in regard to Paul's own position, but if true, it would give added force to his counsel addressed to widowers and widows that they "should remain even as I do" (cp. Diag). This is in complete harmony with his opening statement in v.1:- "it is good for a man not to touch (have sexual relations) with a woman." But he does not forbid remarriage. hence....

### Verse 9

"but if they cannot contain, let them marry" - the word "contain" is 'enkrateumai' - "to exercise mastery or dominion over." The Diaglott translates this as "possess self control. "The self-control in question being that which enables a man not to "touch" a woman.

"it is better to marry than to burn" - "to burn" is the Greek 'puroomai' meaning "to glow with heat as in a furnace, metaphorically to burn." The Diaglott has "inflamed." As pointed out in the notes on v.1, this word is clearly related in the mind of the Apostle to the word for "touch." It would be good if, like Paul, the previously married could suppress sexual desire and have no need to "touch" a woman (cp. v.1, 7-8), but uncontrolled desire is dangerous; it is better to remarry than to risk "fornication" if self control cannot be exercised. Remarriage for the bereaved is perfectly lawful, but "only in the Lord" (cp. v.39).

## Vv 10-11 CHRIST'S COMMAND TO THE MARRIED

### Verse 10

"Unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord" - Paul is still riveted to the question which had prompted his reply in v.1, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." Implicit in the slogan of the ascetics was a repudiation of marital duty and perhaps even of marriage itself: certainly where a believer was married to an unbeliever it seems they counselled dismissal (cp. vv.12-14). To rebut these tendencies, the apostle lays down a commandment which he hastens to add is only a restatement of a commandment of Christ concerning marriage. This obviously gave added force to his "charge or command" ('paraggello'), but in no way weakened the force of the apostolic commands which follow where appeal to specific laws of Christ could not be made (cp. 1 Cor 14:37).

"Let not the wife depart from her husband" - This was the essence of Christ's teaching in Matt 19:4-6. What God had joined was not to be "put asunder" ('chorizo') by the action of man. The word for "depart" here and in v11 is 'chorizo' signifying, in the middle voice, "to separate oneself, to depart from a person, thus to put a space between." The word primarily speaks of separation, and by extension ultimately came to be used of divorce which may ensue from separation. 'Chorizo' has been found along with 'aphiemi' (used by Paul in v.11) in ancient legal papyri with the meaning of full divorce. However, it is clear Paul has in mind only separation in this context, because he speaks of the reconciliation of the separated parties.

Christ's law forbade both separation and divorce. The former is normally the action of one seeking to escape the responsibilities of marriage, the latter the action of one seeking to end the marriage permanently. Both result in a space being put between what God made 'one-flesh'. Hence in selecting the word 'chorizo' in Matt 19:6, the spirit represented Christ as

prohibiting any action that jeopardised the union of marriage. By repudiating sexual relations within marriage, the ascetics of Corinth had taken the first step in the wrong direction, however high-sounding their motivation may have seemed. The next step for the zealous ascetics was to separate altogether and perhaps this course had already been advocated. But Christ and Paul both forbade the believer to initiate separation, and this obviously put an end to the assertion that Christ could be better served in a state of separation. In a brief aside, Paul acknowledges that separation may become a fact of life in marriage, even between believers, but should it occur against the law of Christ, the sin must not be compounded by contemplation of divorce and remarriage.

### **Verse 11**

"But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband" - in the Greek, these words are in parenthesis as though they were an aside by the Apostle to address another aspect of this subject, namely:- what if separation should occur? This is in the subjunctive mood and passive voice (with middle signification) indicating that a wife may become the subject of separation, evidently by her own action. A literal translation would be:- "But if also she be separated" (cp. Interlinear Greek-English N.T.), or "If but indeed she is separated" (Interlinear Bible). Separation is forbidden, but where it becomes a fact of life, Christ's law forbids pursuit of remarriage and provides only one positive course of action - reconciliation. "Reconciled" is 'katalasso', signifying to 'change from enmity to friendship, to reconcile'.

This implies the need for mutual effort and the grammar suggests this. The imperative mood is employed, denoting a command to the wife, while the passive voice requires a readiness by the husband to receive her. It is obvious therefore, that "unmarried" ('agamos') in this verse does not mean to be without a marriage partner. As we have seen, even divorce does not produce that result. The context demands that the word be understood as being in a state of marriage but living as though one was unmarried with no prospect of marriage to another.

"and let not the husband put away his wife" - the verb translated "put away" is 'aphiemi', denoting in the present infinitive and active voice, 'to leave' (cp. Roth, RV). The command of Christ to husbands is quite plain:- "Do not leave your wife". The ascetics of Corinth who repudiated sexual relations in marriage and perhaps advocated separation to accomplish this, were thus effectively silenced by Christ's command.

## **Vv.12-16 THE STATUS OF MIXED MARRIAGES - THE BELIEVER'S RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Verse 12**

"But to the rest speak I, not the Lord" - the translations differ here as to whether Paul is speaking of some remaining matters raised by the Corinthians in their letter to him, or whether he turns to address those in the Ecclesia whose situation was not covered by his previous remarks. It matters little, the result is the same. The question of "touching" a woman (cp. v.1) is still firmly fixed in Paul's mind. Those with ascetic tendencies married to unbelievers, would have seen greater justification for ceasing all marital relationships in their case. Surely it could be argued on the grounds of holiness, that sexual association with an unbeliever should be repudiated! Thus Paul had to address the question of marriage

relationships with unbelievers; a subject which the Lord had not specifically addressed in his teaching, though the same basic principles applied. The believing partner is not to initiate separation or divorce. Christ's command to married believers was unequivocal: no separation, divorce or remarriage (cp. v. 10 -11 ). It is inconceivable that his command to a believer in a mixed marriage would have been any less demanding. To contend otherwise requires that we view marriage with an unbeliever to be less binding than that between two believers. This cannot be so and it is this very point that Paul proceeds to settle. It is clear that the question of the status of mixed marriages had arisen among the Corinthians; the result perhaps, of the rigorists assertion that it was good not to touch a woman.

"she be pleased to dwell with him" - the word for "pleased" is 'suneudokeo' signifying literally 'to think well with, to take pleasure with another in anything, to approve of, to assent'. The R.V. translates this as "content". The word for "dwell" is 'oikeo' - 'to dwell, to inhabit as one's abode'. This speaks of an unbelieving wife who is perfectly content to fulfil her role as spouse and companion in the home.

"let him not put her away" - Again, the word 'aphiemi' is employed as in v.11. The R.V. translates this:- "Let him not leave her", which gives plainer sense to the word and to the context. Paul is answering the problem of those who sought to separate themselves from marriage partners for reason of religious purity. The believing husband is commanded not to contemplate leaving an unbelieving wife. An identical commandment is given to the believing wife with the unbelieving husband in v.13. Paul is not here concerned with the question of a marriage where the unbeliever makes it virtually impossible to sustain the relationship. His subject is a mixed marriage where there is assent and contentment on the part of the unbeliever but which is threatened by the departure of an ascetically minded believer seeking religious purity. That this is the case is shown by his rejoinder in v.14 to the apparent assertion of the ascetics that marriage to an unholy alien was not in fact a real marriage at all. This view of the ascetics is only one step removed from the view that a marriage contracted in the world between two who are in darkness is "a mere compact of the sexes", and not really a marriage at all.

#### **Verse 14**

"For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife" - "sanctified" is 'hagiazō' - 'to make holy, to set in a state opposed to the common or unclean'. The use of this word provides a clue to the nature of the assertion by the rigorists of Corinth. It appears they claimed that the non-believer was unholy and therefore unfit for association with a believer. Consequently, the marriage could be regarded as non-existent. Paul counters this by directing attention to the children. If there was no real marriage, then the children produced by this relationship were illegitimate! This jolting rejoinder helps restore some rationality to the discussion.

The fact is, as far as God is concerned, marriage as a state is just as real and binding among unbelievers as it is among believers. A mixed marriage, where the unbelieving partner is content to dwell in peace, is not to be regarded any differently to marriage in the Truth where separation and divorce are forbidden (cp. v.10-11). It is for this reason that Paul says the unbelieving spouse is "sanctified" in the believer. This sanctification is not the acquisition of spiritual holiness through association with a believer, but rather complete fitness to be a partner in every aspect of marriage. This is the sense in which Paul uses the

same word 'hagiazō' in 1 Tim.4:5 in relation to the fitness of meat for consumption by saints. The Apostasy would command abstention from meats (cp. v.3), but saints with knowledge of the Truth through the Word of God, and prayers of thanksgiving would have no difficulty in partaking of it. The Word and Prayer do not change the constitution of the meat but do provide the conditions whereby it can be used with perfect fitness by saints. So it was in the case of marriage to an unbeliever. He or she was fit for use by the believer and marital responsibilities outlined by the Apostle in vv.2-5 were equally applicable to a mixed marriage.

"else were your children unclean; but now are they holy" - the word 'akathartos' - 'impure, unclean' is contrasted with 'hagios' - 'holy, set apart'. Paul's obvious meaning is that the children were legitimate, not illegitimate as would have been the case, if the assertion had in fact been correct, that marriage in unbelief was invalid. If the children were legitimate before the conversion of one parent, then they were also legitimate afterwards. That being the case, the same was true of the marriage. Conversion did not change its meaning or responsibilities, it only brought them into clearer focus for the believing partner.

### **Verse 15**

"But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart" - the word for "depart" is again 'chorizo' in both instances. Occurring in the middle voice, a literal rendering would be:- "separate himself". Paul's command to the believing partner has been, "do not separate from an unbelieving partner where the latter is content to preserve the marriage". Now he addresses the question of a believer's responsibility if the unbeliever separates himself and forsakes the marriage. This is an important question. Realising the permanence of the marriage relationship, the earnest believer will be anxious to do everything possible to preserve the marriage and to fulfil their responsibilities to it. To what extent do those responsibilities go? "Let him separate himself" (cp. Interlinear Bible) says Paul. If the believer has sincerely endeavoured to provide a basis for the marriage to be preserved and the unbeliever forsakes the home permanently, nothing can be done, but to allow him or her to depart. The believer's responsibility ceases at that point. Marital duty is no longer relevant. Hence Paul adds: -

"a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases" - "under bondage" is the Greek word 'douloo' signifying in the passive voice 'to be enslaved'. The word occurs here in the perfect indicative tense expressing a condition resulting from past action. Marriage brings responsibility. Some of these responsibilities have been the subject of Paul's directions from v.2 onwards. If the context is adhered to, it is obvious that he is here referring to those marital responsibilities upon which any marriage relationship depends for its harmonious continuance. The "bondage" is that to which he referred in v4 - submission to the will of the other in the matter of marital duty and its attendant responsibilities. However, strenuous attempts have been made by those espousing the "Pauline Privilege" theory to show that 'douloo' relates to "the law of marriage" and therefore to the legal relationship of marriage, rather than the responsibilities of that relationship. Two arguments are pressed to establish this point. We need to carefully examine each in turn.

Firstly, it is contended that Paul's context is the legal termination of marriage. The word 'aphiemi', having been used occasionally in the profane writings for divorce, is said to have the meaning of legal dissolution of marriage in vv.11-13, and yet nowhere in Scripture does

it have this exclusive meaning. The emphasis of this word is on leaving or departing from another, which may indeed culminate in divorce, thus creating a separation. To rest an entire case on one possible sense of meaning of any word is dangerous, but especially so when it is yoked in this context with 'chorizo' which is only used in the N.T. of separation. Paul's context to this point has not been legal termination of marriage, but separation for reasons of religious zeal and purity.

Secondly, it is argued that 'douloo' (cp. v.15) and 'deo' (cp. v.27,39) mean virtually the same thing, ie. the whole marital relationship and bond . There are eight occurrences of the word 'douloo' in the N.T., and none except this one, have any connection with marriage. The context therefore, must be the final arbiter of its meaning here; a meaning which we would expect to be in harmony with its general usage in the N.T. The word occurs in Acts 7:6; Rom.6:18,22; 1 Cor.9:19; Gal.4:3; Titus 2:3 and 2 Peter 2:19 where its obvious meaning is 'to become or to be made a servant or slave'. To assert, as some have, that the word embraces the legal bond of marriage because of its alleged connection with the whole master/servant relationship is a conclusion simply bereft of lexical and contextual support. Paul uses the word 'deo' in vv.27,39; and Rom.7:2 to refer to a bond or contract of marriage. 'Deo' signifies 'to bind, tie, or fasten'. It has a wide usage, but in relation to marriage it is akin to the idea expressed in the Hebrew word 'dabaq' rendered "cleave" in Gen.2:24.

Marriage is a binding relationship but it is not slavery. To employ the figure of the master/slave relationship to marriage is incorrect and quite unscriptural. To merge the words 'deo' and 'douloo' as though they have the same meaning in the context of marriage is just as improper. This is to indulge in what might be called 'the root fallacy': the belief that the meaning of the root of a word can confidently be taken to be part of the semantic value of any 'etymologising', or giving excessive weight to the origin of a word over and against its actual semantic value in a given context. Even if these two words can be shown to be related, the test of meanings of words is by their contexts, not their root.

A confusion of scriptural figures has led some to the conclusion that 'douloo' and 'doulos' refer to the legal "bondage" of marriage, but a simple concordance study will show that neither of these words is ever used to describe the marriage relationship. 'Deo' is the word employed for that purpose and Paul is careful to discriminate between these words. He uses 'douloo' twice and 'doulos' four times in Rom.6 when speaking of our former and present state in relation to two slave masters - Sin and Righteousness, but employs only 'deo' in Rom.7:1-5 where the figure is the bond or "Law of Marriage".

It needs to be emphasised again that nowhere in Scripture is marriage presented as a master/slave relationship. Submission in marriage should be mutual (cp. Eph.5:21-33). We may reject, therefore, the assertion that 'douloo' in v.15 speaks of the whole master/slave relationship including its legal bondage and give to the word its normal meaning - 'to be enslaved as a servant'.

That this refers in the context to marital duty is beyond dispute and is proven by Paul's first words in this sentence: "A brother or sister is not under bondage". Both husband and wife have equal responsibility to meet the needs of the other (cp. vv.2-4). Neither is free to please themselves. That is the only way in which they are "enslaved" in marriage. Paul is simply



saying in this verse that where an unbeliever departs, the believing partner is no longer required to fulfil that marital duty.

The "Pauline Privilege" theory allowing divorce of the unbeliever and remarriage by the believer cannot be correct for a number of reasons, and these may be briefly summarised thus: -

(1) The first and most important consideration is the nature of marriage itself:- ie. it is a Divine ordinance arising out of Creation and therefore is binding upon all, irrespective of their faith or lack thereof. Whether a spouse is a believer or non-believer has little to do with Christ's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage which he derived from Gen.1:27 and 2:24. Only death can dissolve a "one-flesh" relationship (cp. 1 Cor.7:39).

(2) The entire context of 1 Cor.7:10-16 revolves around, and does not depart from, Paul's and the Lord's command that a believer must not separate or divorce. In v.15, Paul is simply qualifying his commands concerning marital duty in the case of a broken mixed marriage. He cannot be saying that the believer is no longer "bound in marriage" to his unbelieving spouse because this introduces an idea foreign to the whole context and contrary to the nature of marriage as God established it.

(3) Paul uses the word 'chorizo' in vv.11-15 to speak of separation. In v.11, remarriage is expressly excluded. It is unlikely the opposite would be true of v.15.

(4) Paul's words following v.15 are implicit proof on two counts that he did not intend that deserted believers should remarry. Firstly, the positioning of v.16 which clearly harks back to vv.12-14 provides the reason for persisting with a mixed marriage and appears to match the phrase "or be reconciled to her husband" in v.11. Reconciliation is the only course open to separated believers and this principle applies to the believer in a mixed marriage. Secondly, Paul's counsel in vv.17-24 "to abide as called" is strongly suggestive that he could not have counselled divorce and remarriage to the deserted believing partner.

(5) If the believing partner is at liberty to remarry, they may only do so "in the Lord" (cp. v.39). But Christ expressly forbade marriage to a divorcee, stating that to do so was to commit an act of adultery (cp. Matt.19:9; Luke 16:18). Paul could not therefore have been providing liberty for the deserted and divorced believer to remarry.

"but God hath called us to peace" - a literal translation is provided by Rotherham - "But in peace hath God called us". The Truth brings peace to the believer. This peace comes through the forgiveness of sins (cp. Eph.2:13-18), and results in peace of mind (cp. Phil.4:7), and the capacity to live peaceably with all men (cp. Rom.12:18). This peace brought in to a mixed marriage should provide a basis for a sound marriage, given the good-will of the unbeliever. Wisdom, patience, and consistency may even result in the conversion of the unbeliever in due time without the need for 'nagging' which is certain to undermine the marriage if persisted with (cp. 1 Peter 3:1-4). The believer with the interests of the Truth and the marriage at heart, will promote peace in the home but without compromise of essentials. Paul's use of this phrase suggests that the unbeliever has departed the marriage because of the Truth and in spite of the believer's attempts to preserve the marriage.

His counsel "in such cases" is to allow the unbeliever to depart. If he or she has departed because of the quiet and patient maintenance of the Truth in the home, nothing further can be done. Certainly, the peace in which God has called us cannot be preserved by compromise of the Truth, nor by pressing one's self on an unwilling and hostile partner.

**Verse 16**

"For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband?" - This verse has been understood in two completely different ways. Some have interpreted Paul to be saying that compromise to preserve a mixed marriage should not be contemplated. "How do you know that your compromise of the Truth will finally lead your unwilling partner to conversion?" is perhaps an adequate paraphrase of this interpretation. Others believe that Paul is referring back to verses 12-14 and is thus providing the reason why a mixed marriage should not be forsaken by the believer. Like the Apostle Peter (cp.1 Peter 3:1-4) he is said to be providing hope and encouragement to the believer in a mixed marriage situation. Which of these views is correct? The translations are not much help, often being weighted with the particular interpretation favoured by the translator. In fact, the A.V. is a good and faithful translation in this verse and comes very close to the original. The context is therefore the only real guide to understanding here.

This writer believes the context favours the latter view; ie. that v.16 is connected with Paul's counsel in vv.12-14 that mixed marriages should not be forsaken, because while the marriage is harmonious there is always the hope of converting the unbeliever. The following reasons are given in support of this view:-

- (1 ) Paul's emphasis in this context has been upon the preservation of marriage by faithfully meeting the responsibilities which it brings. This view is consistent with that theme.
- (2) The first two words of v.17 provide a key to interpretation which must not be missed. The words 'epi me' lit. "if not" are so rendered by Rotherham, Diaglott, and Youngs Literal. This gives to v.17 an obvious connection with v.16 with clear implications for the context. "If not", introduces Paul's discourse on the principle that should govern marriage, among other things, after one's call to the Truth. This construction of v.17 would appear to rule out the first reading of v.16 mentioned above, as a little careful thought will reveal.
- (3) It is said that early writers on the N.T. connected v.16 with v.13, whereas commentators from the thirteenth century onwards thought v.16 to be the explanation of v.15. This fact of itself would not be of any importance, but the demands of contextual congruency make it clear why it was so.

**Verse 17**

"But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one" - As previously noted, this verse begins literally "if not"; ie. if it is not possible to convert an unbelieving partner, and he or she forsakes the marriage, the believing partner is to remain in the state in which the call of the Truth came. This is the plain import of these words in complete harmony with the context.

"So let him walk" - Roth. "So let him be walking". The apostle now amplifies this theme in the following verses to the end of v.24. There he concludes with the over-riding principle of this chapter, "Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God". Circumcision and bond service are added to the believer's marital state as things not to be changed on coming to the Truth.

We will not enter into a detailed analysis of vv.17-24 here, except to note an important principle introduced in v.19. There the Apostle says that "circumcision is nothing, and

uncircumcision is nothing but the keeping of the commandments of God (is everything)". On careful reflection, this is a remarkable statement. Circumcision was a commandment of God given to Abraham (cp. Gen.17:9-14). It both preceded and took precedence over the Law given through Moses, and yet it was not binding on believers from Apostolic times onward. Paul even says that it counted for nothing. What are we to make of Paul's statement? Circumcision was an important commandment of God to Abraham and to subsequent generations, but it was not relevant to believers from Apostolic times. We also know that it will be reintroduced in the Kingdom Age (cp. Ezek.44:9).

A vital principle is established here. The commandments of God are paramount to believers whatever they are and in whatever time they are given. Those commands may be different at various stages of human history according to God's purpose. It is not for us either to question or confuse God's commands in matters great or small. To Abraham, God could command separation from Hagar to establish a principle, but to Brethren in Christ, separation is forbidden.

Under Moses Law God suffered divorce, but Christ completely forbade it. Those who advance the practices of former dispensations or even possible practices in the Kingdom Age as a basis of action for believers today make a serious error. It is not what God commanded previous generations, or will suffer in future generations that is important to us. All that matters is that we keep the commandments made to us and these Paul has made plain in this chapter.

## **Vv.25-38      DIRECTIONS AND ADVICE TO THOSE NEVER MARRIED**

As previously shown, the Apostle now turns to a different aspect of the subject with the introductory words of v.25, "Now concerning", which constitute a structural marker in the closing chapters of the epistle. He has dealt with the questions concerning those married or previously married, and now he turns to answer questions raised by the Corinthians about those not married, some of whom were apparently about to marry. This is a vital fact and once recognised puts an end to problems that have arisen over vv.27-28. It will be necessary for us, therefore, to establish this vital separation of subjects. In attempting this, we will address only the critical phrases and words of this section of the chapter.

### **Verse 25**

"Now concerning virgins" - In the Greek this reads literally "But concerning the virgins" with the definite article present. Paul turns to address a specific class in the Corinthian Ecclesia who had obviously been the subject of a specific question addressed to him. The word for "virgins" is 'parthenos' signifying 'a virgin, a young unmarried person of either sex', and is so used in a figurative sense in 2 Cor.11:2 and Rev.14:4. That the word is used here of both unmarried men and women is made clear by the context itself.

In v.26, speaking of virgins, Paul says "It is good for a man so to be", and then immediately adds "art thou bound unto a wife?" This indicates that he has in mind principally the brethren. It is not until v.28 that he makes mention of unmarried sisters saying, "and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned". Here the words "a virgin" are in the feminine gender in the Greek.

"I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgement" - Again, as in v.12. the Apostle cannot draw on commandments of Christ concerning virgins, but he offers his spirit-guided apostolic judgement on the question in hand. We can be assured that Paul's "judgement" is perfectly consistent with the principles he has previously enunciated (cp. 1 Cor.14:37).

### **Verse 26**

"for the present distress" - the word 'anagke' signifies 'constraint' and seems to refer to a distressful situation which had befallen the Corinthian Ecclesia that applied some constraints to freedom of action. Paul's advice is coloured by "the present distress" and he emphasises the same principle as in vv.7-8 but here it is applied to those who had never married. Celibacy is to be preferred to marriage. Especially when times of trouble are upon the Ecclesia.

### **Verse 27**

"Art thou bound unto a wife" - Vv.27-28 are often interpreted as though they did not rightfully and naturally belong to a context in which the Apostle is obviously dealing with virgins. Various devices are employed to accomplish this. Some treat these words in a parenthetical manner and argue that Paul has found it necessary to revert to speaking to those already married or previously married. Why he should do this is not satisfactorily explained and on any objective reading of the text it cannot be sustained. What then is the stumblingblock to reading these two verses simply as part of the context "concerning virgins"? It would seem to be twofold, based on the meaning ascribed to the words "bound" and "wife". The word "bound" is 'deo' signifying 'to bind, tie, or fasten'. It is used again in this chapter in v.39 of the bond that marriage imposes on a woman. However its simple meaning is 'to be bound to anything'. Could it not refer to a commitment to marry; a betrothal or engagement which binds two together? In ancient times a betrothed woman was regarded as a man's wife (cp. Deut.22:23-24; Matt.1:18-20; cp. also Edersheim 'Sketches of Jewish Social Life' - page 148). Seeing the context unquestionably refers to virgins and specifically unmarried men in vv.25-27, it is reasonable to postulate that Paul is referring to engaged or betrothed couples.

The next problem is the use of the term "wife". Does this not mean a spouse? The word in the Greek is 'gune' signifying 'a woman, either married or unmarried'. The context determines which of these states a woman occupies, as a simple concordance study of the use of the word in the N.T. will demonstrate. Let us analyse the use of the word in this chapter alone. This will be sufficient to show that the word is used interchangeably of married and unmarried women, and that it is the immediate context that determines which is the case. 'Gune' occurs 21 times in 1 Cor.7. Its first occurrence (v.1) obviously refers to women in a general sense because Paul goes on to exhort brethren that they cannot avoid "touching" their wives; here the word again is 'gune'. Its last occurrence in v.39 clearly refers to a married woman however. Thus the first and last uses in the chapter show the diversity of usage which is discernible throughout the N.T. Most of the occurrences of the word in this chapter are in the context of marriage and consequently the meaning is obvious. For example, in v.34 a wife ('gune') is contrasted with a virgin ('parthenos'). Here reference is made to the wife as being "married" so that there is no doubt about her state. No such

statement is made of those "bound unto a wife" in v.27 and if the surrounding context is the arbiter of meaning, then 'gune' in that verse must simply mean 'a woman as a prospective wife' . A literal translation of v.28 is also helpful to establish this fact.

The grammar requires that we read v.28 literally to say, "But if also thou mayest have married thou didst not sin". The subjunctive tense infers Paul's expectation that some "virgins" contracted to marry would have proceeded with their plans before his reply to the Ecclesia's questions arrived. Those so bound to a woman who had now married her had not sinned, but those who through uncertainty or difficulty, who had loosed themselves from a prospective wife were not to seek another. This is perfectly consistent with Paul 's underlying advice, that it was "good for a man not to touch a woman". Careful consideration of this literal translation of v.28 will show that Paul is not referring to those (as in v.27) who are still "virgins" but to those who had left that state by marriage. Consequently the linkage normally made between the last sentence of v.27 and v.28 is not contextually sound.

(Not completed)

Author – Jim Cowie

## Appendix 1

### THE ISSUE OF CONTINUOUS ADULTERY

This matter has been discussed on pages 41-43 of these notes. The conclusions reached there will not be repeated here. Anyone reading this appendix who has not thoroughly considered the doctrinal arguments presented in the previous chapters of this book is being unfair both to themselves and the writer.

The purpose of this appendix is to review the practice generally encountered when ecclesias must deal with remarried divorcees either before the Truth enters their lives or afterwards.

There are some in the Brotherhood who still insist that remarried divorcees are living in a state of ‘continuous adultery’ and therefore conclude that the only basis for fellowship is dissolution of the new marriage. This has usually taken the form of having the parties desist from sexual relations permanently while continuing to live on the same premises. For the most part this is due to the existence of children from the marriage (or from the previous marriage) being involved. It is generally acknowledged that these children should where possible be raised by two parents – one who will be a provider.

Needless to say, this practice has rarely (if ever) worked successfully. It is not difficult to understand why. For a husband and wife to be asked to live in a close domestic situation without recourse to sexual activity once an integral part of their relationship is asking the impossible of human nature. The Scriptural advice for avoiding temptation is to flee. How is this possible in such a circumstance.

Other ecclesias have asked members who are divorced and remarried to leave the current marriage and return to the original partner. This too has proved unsuccessful, and sometimes disastrous in its consequences for all concerned.

The vast majority of ecclesias recognise a marriage of previously divorced people when they come to the Truth and are baptised. They are not asked to separate, or to desist from sexual activity. The marriage is recognised for what it is – a marriage. It may have adulterous origins (and this is true whether it is entered into prior to, or after the Truth enters their lives), but it is a relationship (a contract) that exists just as much as any previous marriage entered into (refer to the fundamental principles canvassed at length in Chapter 2).

As explained in this book, adultery occurs when one conceives the idea of consorting with another person while their original marriage partner is alive (Rom. 7:2-3). This act of adultery matures when a new marriage is contracted. The adulterer now has multiple marriage partners. The only way forward is to acknowledge the sin involved and invoke the Scriptural injunctions governing the ecclesial service of those with multiple partners (e.g. Titus 1:6). This applies to those newly coming to the Truth, and those who sin by divorcing and remarrying in the Truth. The latter must publicly acknowledge their sin as a basis for refellowship. To minimise, or at worst to justify such actions is suicidal to both offender and advisor (Mal. 2:11-14).