

# **DIVORCE & REMARriage**

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**THE ISSUES MADE CLEAR**

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**bibletalk<sup>.TV</sup>**

DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE – THE ISSUES MADE CLEAR

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# Forward

February, 1977: Jim Waldron affirmed in debate: "Unscriptural divorce renders any succeeding marriage invalid and adulterous in the sight of God as long as the original parties live."

## **IS THIS TRUE?**

In late November, 1977, Andrew Connally affirmed in debate that one who unscripturally divorces his mate and marries another "continues to commit adultery as long as he lives with the second mate."

## **IS THIS TRUE?**

On what are these affirmations based? What arguments are offered as proof? Can we look this up in the Bible?

In our time divorce is such a common occurrence that it touches the lives of all of us. Those of us fortunate enough never to have had a divorce must nevertheless face it daily in the lives of people around us. Especially so if we are Christian leaders. For most of us it involves close relatives. So we will, of necessity, make decisions about it and take some kind of position concerning it. The only question is, "Will we study it first?" Will we examine the evidences for and against each premise from the standpoint of scripture and then decide, or

will we just choose a position based on what we have heard said most often, or perhaps what our religious party says?

The need is great for responsible study and to that need this book is addressed. These are grave decisions which affect the lives of millions of people here on earth and the destiny of those same millions in eternity. We must act in this matter as people of faith, desiring only that the will of God be done in all things.

For over 20 years now our national divorce rate has exceeded a million a year. This means that over 40 million persons have become divorcees in that time span. The men quoted in our foreword, and others who see it as they do, believe that Jesus legislated an inflexible prohibition against future marriage for about 30 million of those people, for the rest of their lives. They insist Mat. 19:9 teaches that and that the apostles confirmed it.

In contrast I believe they are completely wrong, that Mat. 19:9 says no such thing, and that the apostles, far from confirming that idea, expressly said the opposite, i.e. that no one is to be denied the right to have a marriage. I believe the theory denying marriage rests on assumptions of human tradition which are not found in the bible at all. Can I prove this? Or am I guilty, as some have charged, of rejecting Biblical moral standards? Can we go to the text of the Bible and find out what God has said about it?

If I am right it means that the text of the Bible is being perverted to accommodate a man made doctrine! Can you afford not to look at the evidence to see whether this is true? Let's first check out the matter of a reliable standard. Do we agree that the Bible is it and do we agree on what is the correct way to use it?

# 1.

## The Standard

Honest study! That is all anyone has a right to ask and it is all we ask here. But we must understand the premises involved so we are in a position to study the real questions at issue. This must be the first step before we line up with any faction or person. It is not **who** is right that matters but **what** is right.

Everybody says they go by the Bible. Probably most believers intend to. But many who claim that most vehemently still hold to concepts that contradict plain Bible statements. There are reasons for that and it will be good for us to look at a few of the most common pitfalls, lest we inadvertently do the same thing.

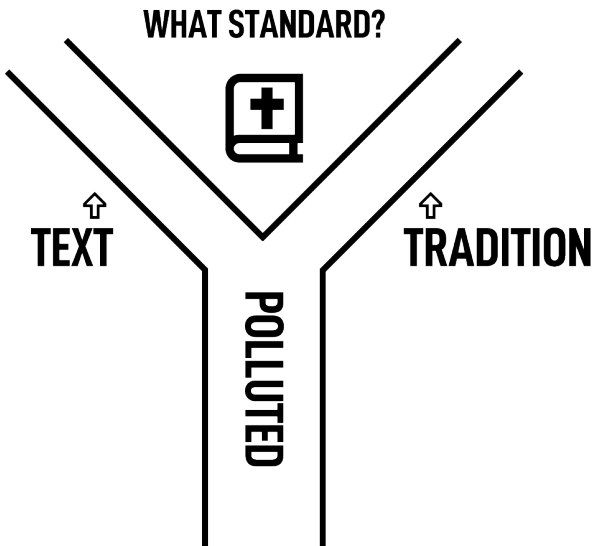
### SCRIPTURE AGAINST SCRIPTURE

Many people read Ephesians 2:8-9 and conclude that grace is the only thing involved in salvation, that baptism is not required. Others read 1 Peter 3:21 and conclude that baptism is a commodity to be

traded to God in exchange for salvation. Once either concept is locked in place, scriptures on "the other side of the coin" are not effective. Yet each considers himself loyal to the Bible. The truth is neither is really loyal to the text until his thinking is responsive to statements of God he reads anywhere.

## BEYOND LIP SERVICE

Jesus said of the scribes and Pharisees, "These people honor me with their lips but their heart is far from me." (Mat. 15:8). We might think these were men who cared not about the word of God or about accuracy. Not so! They were very dogmatic and so extremely zealous for the law that Jesus said they "strained gnats" in their tedious attention to minor things. It was not a lack of desire to get it right that was their problem. It was that they were so committed to their doctrinal conclusions that scripture statements to the contrary just bounced off them, having little or no effect on their thinking. Jesus cited Bible statements that should have enlightened them, but they instinctively rejected anything that opposed their traditions, even scriptures. It can happen to anyone and we need to be wary of this pitfall.



The only pure and reliable source of information as to what God's will is on any matter is the text of the Bible. It is not wrong to consider the interpretations of men who have studied the scriptures. But they must be considered only as possible interpretations, for they could be right and they could be wrong.

When men's theories are so established that they become binding traditions then our stream of information is polluted from that point on. When tradition merges with the scripture text the result is a concept that is partly Biblical and partly human. The divine information source is mixed with human judgments and is no longer infallible. This, we must understand, is a procedure that is not acceptable to God. It makes for vain worship. Jesus made that plain when He said of the Pharisees, "In vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Mat. 15:9). We need to be straight on this going in. It applies especially to the study of divorce and remarriage as it is being done in our time. How much of what is taught comes from the text of the Bible and how much of it comes from traditional theory? We must look at that with open eyes.

The Pharisees had the word God had given through Moses and the prophets. (Mat. 23:2). But having it and using it rightly are not the same thing. They also had the theories and interpretations of their theologians and these had also become entrenched as authoritative. This Jesus saw as a mistake of such magnitude as to nullify their standing with God. In Mark 7:8 He mentioned these traditions which, in order to keep, they had set aside God's commands. He then added, "Full well ye reject the commandment of God that ye may keep your own tradition." (Vs. 9). In Mat. 15:9 He said it constituted vain worship.

Throughout history it has been typical of man to get to thinking of certain ideas and concepts as having come from God which actually are interpretations, human theories about divine things. These often may actually contradict what God did say, as Jesus pointed out concerning certain rabbinical traditions.



Sometimes we recognize that certain sayings are not in the Bible and we refer to them as "chimney corner scriptures." But it is also true that a lack of scripture foundation is not always detected. Many of the most widely held theological concepts are popular without the support of any Bible passage to say so. The more important the question the greater the need to check for Bible authenticity. Human theory is very susceptible to error.

## **MANY WAYS TO MISUSE THE SCRIPTURES**

Another common way of mishandling scripture might be called "proof - texting." In this we say what scripture says but only selected portions of it. Other significant Bible statements are omitted so as to convey a message which is not true to all God has said on the point. As you may recall, the devil quoted scripture in his tempting of Jesus. But the passage he quoted did not tell it all so Jesus responded with "It is also written... " and gave more of what had been said. Remember, a half-truth can convey a false idea. Someone has correctly said, "Be careful about half truths. You might have the wrong half."

I have known preachers who boasted, "When people come to me for advice on divorce and remarriage, I just give them what the Bible says and let them make up their own mind." But what they actually did was give them Mat. 19:9, perhaps a parallel passage, and maybe Romans 7:1-3. They did not give them 1 Corinthians 7.2, 9, or 28. This is like the "faith only" teachers who, when asked about salvation, give the questioner John 3:16 and Romans 5:1 and then "let them make up their own minds."

If there are several passages which shed different angles of light on a subject, we have not really given them what the Bible says unless we give all of them. If we give someone only a portion of these passages, those which do not disagree with our viewpoint, we are "proof - texting," misusing the Bible to teach our own conclusions.

Loyalty to the word of God means that our thinking will be geared to what it says and to all it says, as far as we know it. Undoubtedly in the statement, "their hearts are far from me," Jesus meant that their primary loyalty was to their doctrines, not to the Lord. He referred to that as "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

One is not necessarily wrong just because he disagrees with me or with any other man. But when we can read express scripture statements and be unaffected by what they say, our loyalty is misplaced. It is right to have conviction and to be strong in what we believe is the truth. But our loyalty must not be to a doctrinal position as such, but rather to the Lord. We should have such a desire to know and understand His will that we will, with an honest and good heart, read and study all scriptures with an open mind.

## **CORRECTLY IDENTIFY THE QUESTION**

Before we can look up the Bible answer to a question we must first understand what the question is. For instance, in the matter of what is involved in salvation. Suppose two people consult the Bible on it but one understands the question to be, "What purchases our salvation?" while the other understands the question to be, "What does God require of me in order to be redeemed?" They will arrive at different answers. The Bible answer to the first question is "The blood of Jesus." The Bible answer to the second question is "A number of things such as faith, repentance, baptism, and the fruit of the Spirit in a new life." The difference is not that the Bible is inconsistent but that two different questions are being asked.

Even so, in the matter of divorce and remarriage, if two people consult the Bible for answers but one understands the question to be, "Is divorce for trivial cause right?" while the other understands the question to be, "Is marriage right for all people, including the divorced?" they will come away with different answers. The conflict is not in what the Bible says but in the fact that two different questions are being asked.

The Bible gives a definite "No" answer to the first question and an equally definite "Yes" answer to the second question. It is wrong and deceptive to take the answer to one question and apply it to another, different question. But frequently that is exactly what is being done because the issues have been so misrepresented among us in recent years. That is why this study is so much needed. We must take care to identify the question correctly. Only then are we in a position to go to the Bible and find a clear and definitive answer. Too many are very sure they have the absolute answer on the subject who have not yet understood what the question is.

I firmly believe that the **only standard of measurement** in spiritual matters is the written text of the Bible. If you also believe that then probably the information in this book will be helpful to you. If you do not believe that then it is likely you will not find much value in what we say here for it is all based on that supposition.

But merely **having** the right standard and avowing loyalty to it is not enough, any more than it was enough for the Pharisees. We must also **use it rightly**. As I see it this involves the following three fundamentals which surely we all recognize and respect:

1. Real loyalty to the Bible means that my thinking is geared to what it says and my conclusions will be affected by everything I find in the scripture text.
2. All passages that speak on a given subject must be taken into account. We must not array passage against passage.
3. We must be sure to correctly identify the question at issue, that for which we seek a Bible answer.

"Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth."  
- 2 Timothy 2:15 (ASV)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. What do you accept as the authority standard by which truth is determined in spiritual matters?
2. What effect does a Bible statement have on your thinking if it differs with what you already believe?
3. If several Bible passages speak on a subject and I set forth only one in my teaching, have I really said what the Bible says?
4. What is the right way to handle passages that seem to say different things on the same subject, such as **grace** and **baptism**?
5. How did the Pharisees teach for doctrines the commandments of men while at the same time being very zealous for the law?
6. How would you define real loyalty to the scriptures?
7. Is strong conviction in and of itself good or bad?
8. When a doctrinal dispute occurs, how important is it that all involved parties understand what the question at issue is?
9. Do you feel you have a good understanding of what questions are at issue in the present divorce-remarriage controversy?
10. What is a "chimney corner scripture"?

## 2. An Overview of the Conflicting Concepts

TWO VERY DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES



"I feel that brother Hicks tonight has taught a doctrine that is so ungodly that if it is allowed to continue the church of our Lord will cease to be the church of our Lord in a few years."

- Andrew Connally - First negative -- debate - 1977

The "doctrine" taught in the first affirmative speech which drew the above response was that although unscriptural divorce and remarriage is a committing of sin, it is a forgivable sin, like all others except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Persons who have

committed this sin can, upon repentance, be cleansed by the blood of Jesus in obedience to Him, and their rights to have a mate and participate in marriage are not lost because of that sin. This is what was perceived as being so ungodly that it posed a threat to the very existence of the church and of moral decency. Why was it so perceived?

Actually, the story of this problem does not begin with our generation nor even with our century. Hundreds of years ago men decided to declare marriage a "sacrament" and began to think in terms of its being indestructible by human hands. This is the root of the problem. Once it was assumed that man cannot destroy a marriage the idea followed naturally that if two people get a divorce, except for scriptural cause, they are still husband and wife "in God's sight." Therefore, it was reasoned, if such a person marries another mate the second marriage is "invalid." That person is living with one who is not his mate, as God sees it, and is not living with the one God sees as his wife. The Bible passages wherein it is said to be wrong for man to break marriage, are seen as passages saying it is impossible for man to break marriage. "Let not man put asunder" becomes "Man cannot put asunder." This line of thinking ends up making marriage itself a practice of flagrant adultery for one who has been divorced unscripturally. But is this a Bible idea?

My contention in 1977 was, as it is now, that no one can know what is "in the eyes of God" on any matter except as we read what He has said about it in the Bible. The question I raised was, "Did the apostles or inspired writers of the New Testament ever indicate in any way that they understood the matter as these men do?" In their time the divorce rate was as high as ours is today. It was approved by every law they had ever known, at least for men. Does the Bible tell us that anyone was "ineligible to ever have a marriage again"? Certain kinds of marriages were forbidden, such as Herod's marriage to his brother's wife, Jewish marriages to pagans in the Old Testament, the man at Corinth who had his father's wife, and homosexual

relationships. But was anyone ever told he could not have a wife at all? This is what these brethren are saying now.

The widespread confusion that developed among us in the 60s, 70s, and 80s concerning what the Bible says or doesn't say about divorce and remarriage, never should have come about. Probably it would not have except for a strange mishandling of the subject by men who were in positions of leadership and influence. In my lifetime I have never seen any issue provoke more hostility, anger, and outright fear of study, than this one. The mere fact that I raised these questions and asked for proof of the marriage forbidden theory, was interpreted as an endorsement of adultery and, by implication, of sinful practices such as homosexuality, prostitution, wife swapping, bestiality, etc. Even though we strongly and clearly disavowed any such connection or sentiment every night of the debate with Andrew Connally, and re-affirmed our commitment to Biblical moral standards, the misconception of our position continued to be presented. In his second negative speech brother Connally said,



## **WHY BROTHER HICKS WOULD TURN THE CHURCH INTO NOTHING BUT A WIFE SWAPPING SITUATION.**

DEBATE: PAGE 80

The strange way of handling the matter we referred to was that most of our brotherhood leaders accepted the misunderstood version of our opponents and ignored what we said for ourselves. Without giving the biblical confirmation we asked for, the matter was declared "settled," I was pronounced a "heretic," and brethren were told to avoid me and to disregard anything I might say or write.

## **WHY THE REAL QUESTIONS WERE NOT DISCUSSED**

Actually, it is not surprising that Christian leaders in general would reject a viewpoint that had been represented to them as a promotion of immorality and an abandonment of decent moral standards. Of course they would. For the next 5 to 10 years those who perceived

it that way had all the public hearing. They wrote in the publications, spoke on the lecture programs, preached in the meetings, etc. while we were consistently refused a hearing on our own behalf. Several "Annual Lectureships" were started in local places primarily for the purpose of providing a platform for the traditionalist point of view. From the first, in their minds there was nothing to be discussed, only a damnable heresy to be stamped out.

This is how the situation of confusion and misinformation came about. They withdrew from all dialogue with me, refused any further debates, and opened fire with all the weapons they had. For most brotherhood leaders the picture they got was that Olan Hicks had attempted to justify adultery and all manner of immoral practices, and the gallant "defenders of the faith" had risen to the challenge and destroyed his proposition.

## **HOPES FOR A BRIGHTER DAY**

But we did not quit and, fortunately, most of my brethren have a higher integrity level than that and many did not submit to this blindness. We would not presume to judge anyone's honesty. Only God can know their hearts and only God can be their judge. But what was done in this case is very wrong and it is not the way most of my brethren do business. We found this out when we began our own efforts to communicate in whatever ways we could. There were many who were willing to look at things for themselves.

In recent years several of the most highly respected scholars in our universities have looked into the issue more responsibly and they have been allowed on occasion to speak their findings on the real questions at issue. They freely stated that many of the most basic of the premises underlying the traditional theory are simply incorrect textually. (Example, ACU lectures, 1982, and Pepperdine lectures, 1985).



Opposition leaders were not happy about this, and they have been placing the label "Liberal" on many brethren and institutions for nothing more than being open minded. But integrity is winning out. Truth will not be silenced.

My most exhaustive work, a 306-page book covering all aspects of the subject, was published by College Press in 1987 in a nice, hard cover edition. It sold out two printings and now is available in paperback. Its title is "What the Bible Says About Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage." We have also published several smaller books and have been sending out a bi-monthly newsletter to an ever-growing mailing list. We now have exhibit booths at most of the major lectureship programs and workshops.

So the situation is improving. Yet much of the brotherhood is still poorly informed or misinformed, especially in certain sections of the country where the traditional element has more control. But even in those areas the truth is getting out. That is why this book is very much needed right now.

To those of you who do want to look for yourself, whose real concern is for what pleases God, I want to say that I appreciate you. That is why I want to help to get the facts before you. Before any of us can study a matter out honestly, we must have access to the facts in the case and many of you have been deprived of most of these. That is our purpose here, both to clarify what the issues are and to provide information about them.

Let's start with the fact that the issue here is not a matter of "Liberalism" versus "Conservatism." It is a matter of textual accuracy. The material in following chapters is documented to make it easy to check out and to do your own research in the Bible and historic sources. One day we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The "books" that will be opened will still say what they say now. It is extremely urgent therefore, that we know what they say now, as accurately and as thoroughly as we possibly can. May God bless your search for truth.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Why has our affirming of marriage rights for the divorced been seen as an extremely ungodly doctrine?
2. Why has there been such little understanding of what the real questions at issue are in this case?
3. The practice of marriage for divorced people has been likened to what sins?
4. Is it wrong for Christian leaders to reject a viewpoint which is represented to them as an endorsement of immorality?
5. How did the situation of confusion and misunderstanding come about in the church across the land?
6. Is it our usual procedure to take someone else's word for what a person believes? Is it the Biblical way?
7. In what does our hope for a brighter day in the church consist of?
8. Is our question a matter of "Liberalism" versus "Conservatism"?
9. In the judgment day what will be the standard of our judgment? Can we know the answers in advance?

### **3. Two Very Different Perspectives Drawn from Different Sources**

The Council of Trent (1545-63) declared that marriage is a sacrament and, as such, is both indissoluble and under the auspices of the church. My brethren do not look to the council of Trent for guidance, and they do not use the word "sacrament" in reference to marriage. But they have bought into the concept which stems from both ends of this declaration by the council. In articles, books, and debates, they have stated their view that only God can marry you and only God can "unmarry" you, and that the church is both authorized and obligated to make judgments as to who is "eligible" or "ineligible" to marry and to enforce these judgments by withholding fellowship from people who do not submit to them.

## NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

Jewish Law  
Greek Law  
Roman Law

} Divorce and  
Remarriage  
Practiced

PENTECOST DAY

“Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.”

If one looks beyond the Roman Catholic Councils all the way back to apostolic times, that theory is conspicuously absent. For example, on Pentecost day (Acts 2) the Gospel was first preached to thousands of Jews whose divorce rate, as we mentioned, was every bit as high as ours. Yet when people from that background asked, "What shall we do?" the inspired answer was simply, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." The record says nothing about any inquiry into anyone's marital past nor is there any suggestion that some of them could not be baptized until they divorced their present mate.

The fact is, ideas like that came into the picture much later, after men began to misread Matthew 19. First, they deduced that verse 6 means that marriages are made in heaven, that God personally joins each couple together, and what God has joined together man cannot put asunder. Thus, **do not** became **cannot**.

## NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

ACTS AND THE EPISTLES  
BAPTISM FREELY OFFERED TO ALL  
NO MENTION OF MARITAL STATUS

### 1 CORINTHIANS

- 5:1 - Fornication known
- 6:9 - Former adulterers
- 7:2 - Everyone allowed to have a mate
- 7:8-9 - Better to marry than to burn
- 7:15 - One deserted is free
- 7:27-28 - One who was loosed by a mate  
does not sin if he marries.

The rest of the book of Acts and the epistles gives a general history of something like 50 more years of continuing to evangelize the empire. In all that time baptism continued to be offered freely to all who responded to the Gospel message, and we never do encounter a situation where someone was told he could not be a Christian and participate in marriage. The whole concept of "marriage ineligibility" came on the scene later in medieval times. Everything said by the apostles indicates that marriage was seen as God's way for all people on earth except those rare persons who do not need it and do not want it.

The longest single treatment of these matters is found in First Corinthians seven. It is a chapter on marriage approval. To every category discussed their marriage is approved. The only one told not to marry is the woman who is already married, at verses 10-11. The ideology that changed this is the sacrament theory which starts with the idea that Mat. 19:6 declares marriage to be impossible to break

by human hands. Men of that view cannot say today what the apostles said to people in the same situation because they have accepted an interpretation of Matthew 19:6 that the apostles did not hold. This is basically why they find it necessary to require something the apostles did not require.

The idea that marriage is "indissoluble" is carried over to verse 9 and this is why the passage is not allowed to say what it says. In this verse Jesus speaks of a hypothetical case in which a man "puts away his wife except for fornication and marries another." But the traditionalist holds that it is not possible for a man to so release his wife, that God alone can do that and He will not do it unless fornication is the cause. Some do not believe that God will end the marriage even in case of fornication, but most do. Those who say the marriage is not ended in case of fornication allow a separation but not remarriage.

Look at this comparison of each statement in the text with the ruling of tradition on that point:

<b>THE MISREAD TEXT</b>	
<b>MATTHEW 19:9</b>	
<b>THE TEXT</b>	<b>TRADITION</b>
<b>1. Puts away wife (No fornication)</b>	<b>1. Indestructible</b>
<b>2. Marries another</b>	<b>2. Not a marriage. "Invalid."</b>
<b>3. Commits adultery</b>	<b>3. No. Adultery is always a sex act.</b>

To make this verse harmonize with their theory men have coined the phrase, "In the eyes of God." They say this man puts away his wife only as men see it, that "in the eyes of God" he remains married to her. The second statement, "marries another" is also revised to say that he marries the second wife only as men see it, and that "in the eyes of God she is not his wife." Even the statement that he "commits adultery" in such a case is rejected. They say the adultery occurs later, in the sexual actions of the next marriage. Clearly this whole concept has no foundation in the text but, in fact, negates everything it says.

## WHAT IS BEHIND THE TRADITIONAL AFFIRMATIONS?

Why are my brethren affirming that unscripturally divorced people will be living in adultery if they participate in marriage again? Because the Bible says it? No. It is because they believe the theory that in God's sight these persons are still married to their first mates. In my debate with Jim Waldron earlier in 1977 he gave this explanation:

**“ WE ARE AFFIRMING A HIGHER LAW WHICH SAYS THAT  
NO MATTER WHAT THE LAW OF THE LAND DOES THEY  
ARE STILL BOUND IN GOD'S SIGHT.**

DEBATE, PAGE 48

Andrew Connally said, "You cannot have a divorce in God's sight. You can have a legal divorce, but we are not talking about that. That is why we are talking about if it is a civil ceremony and it is unscriptural, they are not married in God's sight. That is what makes the bed adulterous." (Debate, page 72-73)

Regardless of where or by whom a person may have been taught this concept, it is the "sacrament" idea pure and simple, that marriage cannot be broken by human hands and that the church is obligated to judge the matter and declare who is "eligible" or "ineligible" to

have a marriage, which marriages are "valid" or "invalid," and to enforce its judgments upon the people.

Both ends of this tradition are in play today, both the indissolubility of marriage and the church's jurisdiction in the matter so that its decision is the final word. But where was all this during the time the church was led by the apostles? Is it to be found at all on the pages of the New Testament? I say it is not there at all.

The fact is a person is not necessarily living in adultery just because some preachers or elders may say he is. God's original authorization of marriage, given in the beginning as the right way for men and women to relate together on earth, is universal. A person's "eligibility" to have marriage is not determined by the whim of theologians. The premise that unscripturally divorced people are still married in God's eyes needs to be tested out in the scriptures.

The importance of this premise, of course, is in the fact that the whole concept of "living in adultery" rests on it. If that premise is wrong, the man is not still married to the first wife and is married to the second wife, then he is not living in adultery but is living in a marriage. For it to be true that he is living in a continual practice of sin with a woman that is not his wife, the premise of marriage indissolubility has to be true. The fact is, it is not. However, in the writings of traditionalists we do not see articles seeking to prove that "shall put away" (Gr. *apoluse*) in Matthew 19:9 means "divorce only as men see it." They always just assume that and go from there. I have never seen an article seeking to prove that "gameese, ," shall marry, in that text, means to marry "only to men and not to God." This is the whole foundation on which their concept rests, yet they never try to prove it. They have simply jumped over the most basic plank in their platform and have gone on to argue premises which are not at issue at all.

So far, what we have discussed is the standard concept usually encountered among those who forbid marriage to the divorced. But there is another theory now which has become prevalent among my



brethren that is different. It still denies marriage to the divorced but not on the basis of the idea that the first marriage continues to remain intact after divorce. They repudiate that clearly. But they forbid marriage on another, completely different premise. In our next chapter we will examine that theory.

For now, let's recognize two basic truths and ponder them:

### **1. Marriage is not a sacrament.**

It is an arrangement God created for the moral good of mankind. It involves vows that are sacred and are witnessed by God Himself. It is wrong to break marriage. It is not impossible to break marriage.

### **2. Church leaders do not have authority to "validate" or "invalidate" marriages.**

All Christians have a right and a duty to be concerned about moral purity. But concern for moral purity is not the same thing as making judicial rulings and enacting laws for God.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Do the events of Pentecost day (Acts 2) indicate that the apostles held the view tradition does or that they did not?
2. In the rest of the book of Acts and the epistles do we find any instance where someone was either refused baptism because of his marriage or was told he was not eligible to have a marriage at all?
3. What is meant by the "sacrament" theory of marriage?
4. How does the "indissolubility of marriage" idea affect the reading of Matthew 19:6?
5. How does that theory affect the reading of Matthew 19:9?
6. Is there much difference between the statements "It is wrong to break marriage" and "It is impossible to break marriage"?
7. When God authorized marriage in the beginning, how general was the authorization?
8. Have you ever seen any proof that "shall put away" in Matthew 19:9 means "only as men see it"?
9. According to the text, what does the adultery of Mat. 19:9 consist of?
10. Is the word "adultery" ever used in scripture in reference to something other than a sex act?

# 4.

## The "Marriage Unauthorized" Theory

The problem of sorting out the truth on the subject of divorce and remarriage has been compounded somewhat in recent years by the emergence of a new and different theory. This one still forbids marriage to the divorced but not on the basis of the once married always married premise. This one concedes that to be incorrect.

In our 1977 debates both Waldron and Connally contended throughout for the traditional premise that God sees the first marriage as still intact and binding after unscriptural divorce and does not see the next marriage as actually a marriage. About requiring second marriages to break up, Connally said, "They are not breaking up homes. They are breaking up illicit relationships. You cannot break up a home that does not exist and a home does not exist unless God approves it." (Debate, pg. 229). This line of argument was advanced all through both debates.

A short time later it appears that some among those who oppose marriage for the divorced, recognized that this theory does indeed contradict the statements of Matthew 19:9, just as we had said. There Jesus speaks of a man (hypothetically) who does put away his wife without cause and does marry another. Soon a revised line of argument came forth, still forbidding marriage to divorced people but avoiding the direct denial of these statements of Jesus. This theory grants that a divorce does destroy the marriage, even if it is an unscriptural divorce, but still forbids a second marriage on the ground that "God has not authorized such a person to marry."

In 1980 Maurice Lusk of Southeastern School of Evangelism wrote in their February newsletter that the idea of a divorced person being "still married in the eyes of God" is absurd, even if the divorce is unscriptural. He said, "A person not scripturally divorced is just as divorced as those scripturally divorced." He added further, "A person not scripturally divorced does not have scriptural authority to marry another and that is the reason he/she may not marry another, not because he/she is yet married to the person from whom they are divorced." Later this concept was written up and published in a full-length book by Lusk and Gross. 22

This position, while it agrees with the conclusion that marriage is forbidden to most divorced people, disagrees with the basic premise on which that conclusion originally was based.

This newer theory seems to have become accepted pretty widely among brethren, in varying degrees, and has resulted in some confusion within the ranks of marriage forbidders. Is the divorced person to be seen as still married to the first mate or not? Is the second marriage to be denied on the basis of an abiding first marriage or on the basis of a **lack of specific authorization** in scripture for a person of that sort to marry?

During the decade of the eighties there was a signal lack of clarity on this point among writers and speakers promoting the traditional position. A great many actually seemed to be trying to embrace both

premises at the same time and their arguments appear to be based on an amalgamation of the two. Sometimes a single author will say both, at one time that "She is still his wife in God's sight," and at another point in the same composition that "Divorce ends the marriage for both the guilty and the innocent." Later in this book we will review James O. Baird's book, "**And I Say Unto You**," in which you will see this done.

It would be much easier for a person to consider a challenge of his marriage rights if the premise on which it is challenged is clear and precise. There was nothing vague or ambiguous about the statement by the Council of Trent. According to the 24th session, Canon V, "If anyone shall say that the bond of matrimony can be dissolved for the cause of heresy, or of injury due to cohabitation, or of willful desertion, let him be anathema."

There was also no lack of clarity in the affirming of the same idea by our own traditionalist brethren a few years ago. Roy Lanier Sr. wrote, "So if you have divorced your partner, or have been put away by your partner, for any reason other than fornication, and you have married another person, you are now living in adultery. This second union God regards as sinful. In His sight you are still united to the first partner. God joined you to your first partner, but He refused to join you to this second partner." (Booklet, "Marriage, Divorce, & Remarriage," Pg. 6)

In the book, "**Your Marriage Can Be Great**," edited by Thomas B. Warren, such precise statements as this occur frequently, "Divorce for any reason other than adultery does not terminate the first marriage. Remarriage by either or both parties constitutes adultery." (Article, "The Sanctity of Marriage," Bill Collins, page 341)

A great many traditionalists seemed to no longer argue on that basis. But the Spiritual Sword, as late as October 1978, was still saying it. "It is evident that some marriages are of God, and some are not. Just because two people marry according to civil law does not mean God is the author of that marriage and, if two should decide to divorce

without God's one exception of verse, then that divorce is not recognized by God." (pg. 13--14, Article by Andrew Connally.)

## **A MATTER OF SEMANTICS?**

It could be that the more recent theory may not really constitute a change. In a debate in which I served as moderator for John Edwards, Bill Jackson seemed to argue both ways on this point. He said several times that divorced people are not still married and the second marriage is indeed a marriage, and at other times insisted that Rom. 7:2 teaches that they remain bound even after divorce and that the second mate is not his wife. (Austin, Texas, Jan. 1988).

Later I wrote Bill about this, and he sent me this clarification: "Certainly I have made it plain that if a couple get an unscriptural divorce, and thus are not together, the marriage has ended. They have ended it (and the Bible speaks of one putting the other away, ending the marriage) - and that is so, whether or not God's will is being considered. When God's will is considered, the above circumstances being true, they have obtained a divorce, ENDING THEIR MARRIAGE in their sight and in the sight of other men. But when God's will is considered, the union is not ended in His sight, since they are held accountable either to remain as they are or return to one another!" (Emphases his. O.H...).

This seems to put us back to where the dispute began, the concept originally issued by the Council of Trent, but with an effort to, at the same time, avoid the contradiction that it creates against Matthew 19:9. The statements that "the marriage is ended" and "the second marriage is real," mean only that it is so in the eyes of men, not in the eyes of God. It is a way to say "the marriage is ended" and at the same time say "the marriage is not ended." So then the changes are cosmetic revisions only, more a matter of semantics than of substance. The basic concept remains the same. It is simply an effort to harmonize the original sacrament theory that the "put away" and "marry" of Matthew 19:9 do not actually occur, with the statement

of the text that they do occur. It just means more confusion for the person who is trying to sort out the truth on this issue.

However, semantics could turn out to be a bridge to the truth in this case. Some traditionalist writers are now putting it this way: "Yes, the divorce is real and the second marriage is real, but they do not have God's approval." Now, this gets much closer to what the text actually says. The very point of the passage is that to do those two things is to commit sin, specifically the sin of adultery. That tells us God does not approve of doing that. The question at issue has always been, **Does the passage say it is wrong to divorce and remarry or that it is impossible?** Saying "God does not approve of them" is not at all the same as saying, "God sees them as not actual." These are two completely different ideas. Being **wrong** is not the same thing as being **impossible**. It is possible that the more men adjust their terminology to try to avoid contradicting the words of the passage, the closer they will come to what it actually says.

Concerning the theory that divorced people are not expressly authorized to marry, it seems to me that it takes them from bad to worse. It jerks the rug out from under their case completely.

## WHAT ABOUT THE "MARRIAGE UNAUTHORIZED" THEORY?

In the first place we all recognize that if something is authorized generally in the Bible it is authorized for any segment within that general umbrella. Marriage is such a general authorization. In the second place the theory admits that unscripturally divorced people are indeed "unmarried." 1 Corinthians 7:8-9 expressly orders that the "unmarried" be allowed to marry. So there is specific authority for them to marry if they are unmarried. In the third place the theory also concedes that unscripturally divorced people are "loosed" from their previous mates. 1 Corinthians 7:28 states that a man who is "loosed" from his wife does not sin if he marries. So this man has specific authority to marry.

Thus this theory, by admitting that the divorced person is unmarried, has no way to counter the command of 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, "To the unmarried and widows.... Let them marry. " In admitting that the divorced person is "loosed," it has no way to deny the statement of 1 Corinthians 7:28 "Art thou loosed from a wife... if thou marry thou hast not sinned."

This theory then, is even less defensible than the purely traditional one. To me it appears to concede the only basis for argument against marriage for divorced people and leaves one with no foundation on which to deny marriage to them.

This "marriage unauthorized" theory also brings another assumption into the picture. It introduces the premise that God's approval of marriage is not a universal authorization but that each category of people must find their right of marriage specifically authorized, beyond the mere fact that marriage itself is right. James O. Baird wrote, "The right to marry, which God bestows on the human race, (Gen. 2:18-24, 1 Cor. 7:28), is a contingent right, that is dependent on certain conditions." (And I Say Unto You, pg. 35). Later on in this study we will review that entire book, including this argument, because it contains all the basic premises mentioned here. But for now we just call attention to this particular premise and ask you to note it as one of the issues to be studied out.

You may have noticed already that the question at issue among us is not "Is it right for married people to divorce?" The Bible expressly says that is not right. Our question is, "Is it right for divorced people to marry?" Although men may vary in the way they argue against the right of marriage, I believe the question still comes down to a matter of whether or not the premises of the sacrament theory are accurate to the Bible text. When these questions are resolved, the issue of divorce and remarriage will be settled.

The urgent difference I see between these human interpretations and what the Bible actually says, is the bottom-line conclusion that emerges. Traditional premises produce the conclusion that divorced



and remarried persons are living in a continual practice of sin. The scripture text, on the other hand, supports the conclusion that these are sins committed in such cases. A sin continued is not pardoned because repentance requires that the sin be stopped. But a sin committed requires only that it be repented of, discontinued, and cleansed in the blood of Jesus. Whether you base your decision on the premise that such persons are not specifically authorized to marry, or on the premise that they are still married to the first mate, you reason on the basis of traditional assumption. The question is, are these people "living in adultery" or are they living in a marriage after having committed adultery? The only reliable ruling on the question is the testimony of the Bible text, not the voice of tradition.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. How does the marriage unauthorized theory differ from the Marriage unbreakable theory?
2. Does the theory that a divorced person may not marry because he/ she is not specifically authorized to marry, contradict God's original authorization of marriage for all?
3. How does the marriage unauthorized theory compare with 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, if it is agreed that the divorced person is unmarried?
4. How does the marriage unauthorized theory compare with 1 Corinthians 7:28 if it is agreed that the person is "loosed"?
5. The bottom-line conclusions produced by the conflicting interpretations differ in what significant way?
6. Does the church have jurisdiction over marriage matters so that its declaration of "ineligibility" makes it so?
7. In Mat. 19:6 & 9 did Jesus say the man does not have God's approval to divorce & remarry or that it is impossible for him to do so?
8. Is there much difference between the two ideas, i.e. that it is impossible and that it is wrong?
9. How might the struggle over semantics contribute to a more correct understanding of Mat. 19:9?

# 5.

## God Versus Satan

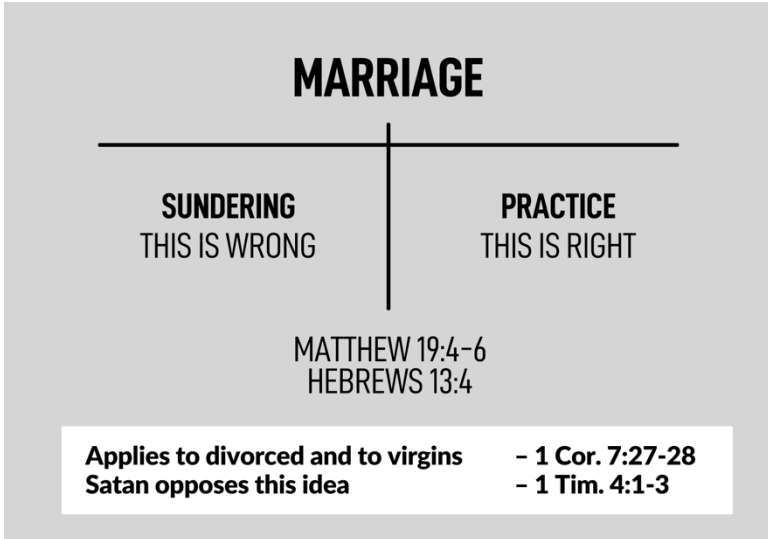
### TWO OPPOSITE POSITIONS ON BOTH DIVORCE AND MARRIAGE

One of the most basic truths of the Bible is the fact that God is for marriage and against divorce. Equally fundamental is the fact that Satan's position is the opposite on both counts. The reason is obvious. Marriage stands as God's appointed way for humans to avoid immorality. (1 Cor. 7:2). Satan does not want immorality avoided. He wants it practiced. At the creation God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make a helpmeet for him." (Gen. 2:18). "Not good" situations are exactly what Satan wants so he naturally wants to get marriage out of the picture. He wants to get divorce to happen in the first place and then he wants to prevent any repair, or healing for the parties involved.

**IN THE BIBLE THE ONLY ONE SAID TO TEACH A FORBIDDING OF MARRIAGE IS THE DEVIL. HE DOES IT THROUGH PEOPLE WHO, IN SO DOING, DEPART FROM THE FAITH. (1 TIM. 4:1-3).**

We would not suggest that brethren who believe that marriage must be forbidden to the divorced are all insincere. I think most of them are conscientious and are concerned for the souls of people. But their believing honestly that the marriage relationship is a practice of adultery for most divorced people, does not make it so and does not change the fact that the Bible says it comes from demons. "Giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons" is the problem, as verse 1 says. One of the most remarkable things about Satan is the fact that he can get committed people of God to fight for Satanic causes without realizing it and while thinking those causes are God's causes. It is incredible but it happens.

Another incredible thing is that the facts on this subject could become so scrambled that the whole picture gets turned around backwards in the minds of many people. In the traditional concept it is not really divorce that is opposed but marriage itself. They preach that divorce is what they oppose, but in practice they accept a divorce situation, even though it is without scriptural cause, just so long as the persons do not marry. Several of the most ardent promoters of the traditional view are men who are divorced, and by their own admission, unscripturally so. But they accept the situation of being in a divorce as okay. It is marriage itself that they see as forbidden. This reverses outright the fundamental Bible truth that marriage sundering is wrong, marriage practice is right.



In the very same words in which Jesus prohibited marriage sundering, He approved marriage practice. (Mat. 19:4-6). This is a basic principle that applies to people who have been divorced as well as to those who have never married. Paul said to a man who had been "loosed" from a wife, "If thou marry thou has not sinned," and added, "and if a virgin marries she has not sinned." In Hebrews 13:4 both ends of this idea are put together in one verse. "Marriage is honorable in all and the bed undefiled. But whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." Of course Satan opposes the whole idea because he wants people to break marriages and he wants them to end up locked into that situation, with no healing available.

Recently, during the time I was writing this chapter, I attended a Sunday service at one of the largest and most influential churches in the brotherhood. The preacher had been asked by the elders to give a sermon on "Commitment in Marriage." Those of you who have been told that I favor divorce may be surprised to learn that I thought it one of the finest sermons I have ever heard and one of the most needed for our time. That lesson had been requested because these elders had come upon a large number of marriages in trouble

in the membership and as they tried to help these families they were aware of a disturbing lack of commitment to the marriage in many cases.

I agree whole heartedly that this is the root of the problem. It is here that Christians can lend a hand in helpful ways. Trying to judge cases after the fact and punish the violators does no good and usually does much harm. I was glad this speaker prefaced his sermon with a statement that they had no intention of pointing the finger of judgment at those who had already been through the trauma of divorce, and added, "I believe God is a God of new beginnings," and "Divorce is not an unpardonable sin."

He then gave a moving lesson on how God is always faithful to His promises and that we, His people, must keep our word. Tragedies of a disastrous nature often occur in the lives of people who do not have this characteristic as a feature of **who** and **what** they are. We must do better in this respect!

Brethren need to stop fighting against marriage practice and start giving a better effort in the fight against marriage sundering. We used to think that divorce only happened to people who were not very good people to start with. But in recent years I have seen it happen to some very Godly, devoted people. It can happen because in marriage you have a two-party situation and one cannot necessarily control what the other one does. God Himself experienced a divorce. (Jeremiah 3:8). Israel, His wife in a spiritual sense, was repeatedly unfaithful and, after many attempts to get her to be faithful, God finally had no choice but to write her out a bill of divorcement and put her away.

The Bible makes it very clear that God does not hold one party in a marriage to an accounting for what the other one did that was beyond their control. One of the most evil and unfair aspects of the traditional concept is that it does exactly that. It makes no allowance at all for the innocence of one who was divorced against their will and without cause. These are held to permanent celibacy for

something their mate did over which they had no control. But the scripture says, "A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases." (1 Cor. 7:15).

## **THE VITAL PLACE OF MARRIAGE IN GOD'S PLAN**

One of the fundamentals of scripture needing to be understood right now is the vital role of marriage in God's plan for moral purity on earth. The place of marriage cannot be filled by anything else. When we stop to realize that the only situation in which sexual activity is right is marriage, it helps us realize more fully how vital it is. When we further recognize the reality of the needs and drives that God has built into us naturally, the fact of marriage being a general necessity is under-scored.

Of course we are not saying that sex is all there is to marriage. Certainly it is much, much more than that. But we are saying that activity of a sexual nature is exclusively right within the marriage context. It is wrong in every other situation. Thus if one is deprived of marriage he is deprived of the only legitimate provision for sexual outlet. This is what Jesus said not all men can receive.

The very reason marriage was instituted in the beginning of human life on earth was the fact that God saw the presence of these appetites and needs, combined with an absence of marriage, as an unworkable situation. Jesus also recognized this when He was on earth. When His disciples suggested it might be "better not to marry," Jesus immediately said, "Not all men can receive that saying," and then explained that some are eunuchs and some are not. He said, "He that can receive it let him receive it." (Mat. 19:1-12).

Notice the recognition of "can" and "cannot" in regard to exercising control of this without marriage. Jesus said "Not all men can receive that." Paul recognized the same thing and on that very basis said concerning the unmarried and widows, "If they cannot contain, let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn." (1 Cor. 7:8-9).

## **MARRIAGE FILLS AN EXTREMELY VITAL AND EXCLUSIVE PLACE IN THE PLAN OF GOD FOR MORAL PURITY**

It is a fact of life that while a few can remain pure without a sexual outlet, and some even prefer it that way, most cannot. I do not think these scriptures mean it is physically impossible, just that temptations toward sinful sexual outlets would simply be overwhelming.

When we put forth this Bible premise in debate our opposition replied that God will enable a person to live a celibate life if he is "ineligible" to have a marriage, regardless of his not being capable of it. "Any child of God that is unscripturally divorced, God will help that child of God to overcome sins of the flesh. God will enable that child of God to 'do all things through him that strengtheneth me...'" People do get themselves in a position where they do not have the right to have an eligible marriage partner, and God says, I will not suffer you to be tempted above that which ye are able but will, with the temptation, provide the way of escape." (Andrew Connally - debate - pg. 159 - 161).

What is overlooked in that line of thought is the fact that God has already provided the way of escape from moral temptation and has specified that it is **marriage for every man and every woman**. In Corinthians 7:2 it is stated that fornication is to be avoided that way. In the passage referred to above (1 Cor. 10:13) God does not promise to give us super human powers to overcome temptations. He promises that no temptation will be allowed to come to us that is above what we are able to handle, and that He will, "with the temptation, also make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it." Since God Himself has stipulated that **marriage for everyone** is His appointed "way of escape" for that particular temptation, how can we reject that and ask God to deliver us from it in some other way? To do that is to claim a promise God has not made while rejecting one He has made. Although it is an unscriptural premise, many promoters of the traditional viewpoint advance it as a



requirement. James O. Baird, for example, argues for it several times in his book that we will review a little later in this book.

Ironically, these brethren also recognize the validity of the premise we are advancing here, i.e. that God has never intended for the morally hazardous life of attempting celibacy to be forced on anyone. Earlier in our debate brother Connally had said, "I maintain that you do not have the right to go out and take off and leave your wife or husband, just because you desire to do it. And if you deny them their conjugal rights, you are putting a temptation before them that God never intended, and you can die and go to hell for that very thing." (Debate, page 112).

In 1 Corinthians 7 this is what the strong emphasis is in the first 9 verses. At verse 2, already mentioned, the need for marriage for everyone. Then at verses 3-5 the need for each mate to give due attention to the physical needs of the other is stressed. The same principle is emphasized three times in these 9 verses. "To avoid immorality," verse 2: "That Satan tempt you not for your lack of self control. Verse 5: "For it is better to marry than to burn," verse 9:

## **VITAL PURPOSES OF MARRIAGE**

### **GENESIS 2:18**

1. Avoid fornication
2. Better than to burn
3. Companionship (Mal. 2:14)

Christianity does not require one to be married who does not want to be. But it does condemn all sexual activity outside of marriage. Therefore, one must either be married or omit all sexual activity from his life. If he cannot do the latter then the scriptures explicitly state that he must be allowed to do the former. It is a matter of

simple physical reality. This is not changed by the fact that one has committed the sin of marriage breaking or of dishonoring his vows, or has had the misfortune to be married to a mate who did that to him. It is sin to do such things but that does not change the fact of the vital nature of the right fulfillment of these needs nor does it change the fact that they can be rightly served only in marriage.

## **GOD HATES PUTTING AWAY**

Again I would stress that this is where the emphasis is put in the Bible and it is where we ought to be putting it. It is wrong to forbid marriage but it is equally wrong not to oppose breaking marriage. Divorce is not an unpardonable sin but it is a sin. Christian leaders are justified in being concerned about the possibility that as a people we might be getting too accepting of divorce and too little opposed to it. Our national divorce rate continues extremely high because there has been a serious decline in the strength of commitment to the marriage bond. Divorce is too easily thought of as a viable alternative to working through relationship problems. As we said earlier, this is not the case with all marriage failures. Many have given the best effort they could muster but still were not able to save the marriage. But in too many instances there is just too little commitment to the vows and the obligations they entail. When things get difficult divorce is seen as almost a first option.

Advocates of tradition have charged that our position with respect to permitting remarriage has been part of the cause of this decline in commitment to marriage, and that the traditional position has what it takes to effectively counter that. But the facts indicate that the reverse may be true. The sharpest increases in the number of divorces occurred during the very time that their viewpoint prevailed most completely.

In 1930 there were only 196,000 divorces in the United States. In 1940 there were 264,000, in 1950 385,000, and in 1965 there were 479,000. During those times divorce among members of the church

was seldom heard of, especially prior to 1960. During that same time the non-traditional view on divorce & remarriage was held by a good percentage of us and was allowed to be heard in our major publications along with the other viewpoint.

L. R. Wilson taught it and so did Foy E. Wallace Jr., G. C. Brewer, Leslie G. Thomas and others. But in the middle to late 60s traditionalist leaders were able to gain almost total control of brotherhood communication outlets and soon the only teaching being heard or even allowed to be spoken, or countenanced as legitimate, was the traditional view.

The incredible increase in divorce during the following 10 years may or may not have been contributed to by that. But the fact is it did happen and the prevalence of that teaching did not prevent it.

In our nation we first exceeded a million divorces a year in 1975. It has continued above that rate every year since, now over 20 years. By 1982 we had reached an all-time high of 1,230,000 divorces and in the church divorce had become so common as to be but little behind the outside world. If the traditional view would retard the divorce rate, how is it that in the time when that view dominated most completely, the divorce rate shot up fastest... in the church?

The truth is that viewpoint is so shot through with fundamental errors that it undermines its own good intentions. It shoots itself in the foot! One of the biggest of these fundamental errors is that it does not focus on what God hates and oppose that, namely putting away. Rather it focuses on what God loves, marriage, to oppose that. Divorce is seen as forgivable if there is no subsequent marriage, while marriage itself is absolutely disallowed.

The biblical method of removing sin from people's lives is a teaching method, converting the heart. When the minds are changed the lives are changed. The idea that this can be accomplished by inflicting a severe punitive sentence on them is a human theory, not a divine one. It does not work.

On the other hand, the most powerful force in the world for reforming lives is teaching, done in love and with patience, together with grace, God's promise of forgiveness and a completely new beginning for all who will repent. No man-made theories about "enforcement" can substitute for this. Our only hope of winning the battle against this or any other sin, is to fight it God's way. This means that we must do a better job of teaching that God hates putting away and teaching the principles involved in why God hates that. Breaking marriage involves breaking our word, the betraying of a sacred commitment witnessed by God Himself. (Mal. 2: 14). The prophet Malachi called it "treachery." God does not hate marriage. He hates the breaking of marriage. That is the side of the matter we need to stand on, **for marriage** and **against breaking marriage**, not the other way around. Marriage serves God's purposes. Marriage destruction and marriage forbidding serves the devil's purposes.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

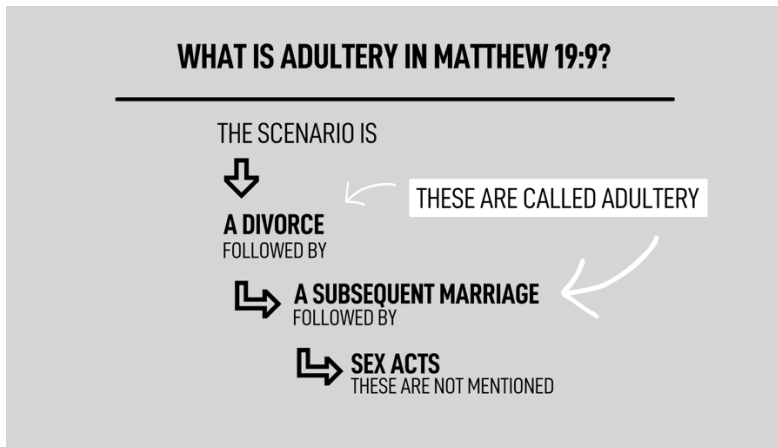
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1. God has approved sexual activity in how many relationship situations?
2. If one is unmarried, how many legitimate sexual options does he have?
3. Is God consistently on the side of marriage for all people or is He sometimes against marriage?
4. What reason has God given for His position regarding question 3?
5. Is Satan consistently an enemy of marriage?
6. Why is that Satan's position?
7. Is it right that there is so little commitment to marriage in the minds of so many today?
8. Does divorce happen only to people of low caliber and shallow commitment?
9. Has God promised to enable people to contain sexually in some way other than marriage?
10. In what way does the traditional view reverse the positions of God and Satan as to who is for what and who is against what?
11. What is the divinely appointed method for removing the temptation of moral sins from people's lives?

## 6. What is the Adultery in Matthew 19:9?

Identifying what the adultery consists of in the divorce passages is being made unnecessarily hard. The wording of the text is not ambiguous yet men have a problem with it. That problem occurs because men arbitrarily assign to the word a sexual meaning but the text, if read in the way conditional sentences are normally read, uses it of two actions which are not sexual. It is the problem again of the traditionalists having a different concept and imposing that on the text.

If one looks at Matthew 19:9 without preconceptions it says very simply that a man who puts away his wife, without fornication being the cause, and marries another, commits adultery. But in debate I asked Mac Deaver in my first written question, "Do you believe that whoever puts away his wife, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery, before anything else is done?" He answered, "No." Why would anyone not accept what is stated in the verse? He explained further, "Because of the definition of the word 'adultery.'" Believing that this word has to refer to a sex act he concludes that Jesus was anticipating what was to come later, as he stated later in that debate.



If someone said, "Whoever aims the gun and pulls the trigger, commits murder," it would convey to us the idea that a murder is committed in doing those two things. Why should it be any different in reading this passage? It is the problem again of men having a different concept and imposing that on the text.

Instead of seeing this man as having committed adultery when he did the two things stipulated in the verse, traditionalists see him as having "entered an adulterous union" in which he will commit adultery at some later time. The two actions of divorcing one and

marrying another are specified in the verse and called "adultery." The sex acts that might occur later are not mentioned at all. Yet the two acts that are mentioned are set aside and the actions which are not mentioned are said to be where the adultery occurs.

Part of the problem stems from the fact that our English language dictionaries define the word to mean a sex act involving a married person with someone not their spouse. But we need to know that this is a modern word with a modern definition and it is the modern definition that is being fed back into the text and this results in changing completely what is said there.

The word "adultery" did not exist in the English language in the middle 16th century. It was invented by the translators of the Geneva Bible in that century. Thus, earlier English translations did not use it. William Tyndale and John Wycliffe both made translations and both translated this word with "**breaketh wedlock.**" In the **B** part of the verse they read it, "committeth advoutry," evidently referring to the vow breaking that was involved.

But the Geneva translators apparently took the Latin word "adulterio," removed the "o" and put an "e" at the end, and coined the word "adulterie," to use in the divorce passages. The English language then had a new word. At this time it was not a sex word. It simply meant to adulterate by adding another element to the mix.

Later the Bishop's Bible followed suit but changed the "ie" to a "y" which gave us our present spelling, "adultery." The King James translators were ordered by the king to follow the Bishop's Bible wherever possible and they did so in these passages. Subsequent translations followed the same course and thus the word became a fixture both in the Bible and in the English language.

When first introduced this word did not do great violence to the text. The Latin word simply meant to adulterate by adding something and this was what the English word meant. It still had reference to what was done in the action of going from one mate to another. But over



the years between then and now the word evolved in meaning, coming to mean a sexual action, probably because of its connection with marital infidelity.

The problem is further compounded by the fact that over the same time period scholars have taken a similar course with the defining of the Greek word. Apparently being subscribers to the theory that has grown up around the English word, scholars of the past two or three hundred years now assign that meaning to the Greek word. They do not give that as its only meaning but they do list sexual action as its first definition. They still recognize the fact that it is also used in scripture to refer to non-sexual things, but they call these "figurative." This gives ammunition to traditionalists and aids them toward overruling what the text says.

Fortunately, however, folks who want to know the truth are not at the mercy of human scholarship. Intelligent as those minds are, as helpful as most of their work is, there still is a higher authority, the word of God itself. The best scholars agree that the final determiner of word meanings is how they are used in the Bible. For example, when we find the word "baptizo" used in reference to dipping or immersing, we know it means that. Even if highly respected scholars may say it means also to sprinkle, when we find it is not used that way in scripture, we know it does not mean that.

Scholars also have their biases and misconceptions. But the word of God remains constant and for this we should be thankful. It enables us to detect mistakes, even when made by some of our wisest men. There is nothing in the etymology of this word, in Greek or Hebrew, to connect it with sexual activity. That connection has developed purely through the passing of time and the influence of traditional concepts which call for it. We all have our tendencies to look at things in the light of what we are used to seeing. Scholars are not immune to that. But a thorough search of scripture is always the key to finding truth on any matter, and that includes determining the meaning of words.

## LOOK IT UP!

If you take a concordance and look up the word "adultery" and read all the Bible verses where it occurs, you will find that it is used to refer to many things that are not of a sexual nature. An example is idolatry. In the Old Testament when God's people were unfaithful to Him and went to idols, God said through the prophets that it was "adultery." Israel "committed adultery with stocks and with stones." (Jer. 3:9). This was not sexual activity, but it was adultery.

Our opposition says, "But that was spiritual adultery." Yes, it was. And that proves that this word is used in scripture to refer to something that is spiritual in nature, not sexual. The fact that the actions involved were not sexual in nature did not keep it from being adultery. Thus the argument that this word cannot refer to something non-sexual is not a valid argument.

Be sure to note this: We are not citing "divorce and remarriage" as the definition of the word "adultery." That would be like giving the word "apple" as the definition of "fruit." There are other kinds of fruit. But the word "fruit" can refer to an apple. In the same way unscriptural divorce and remarriage is adultery. But there are other kinds of adultery too. Saying that the word can refer to it is not the same thing as saying it is the definition of the word.

In the New Testament Jesus used this word in reference to some people who were seeking after a sign. (Mat. 12:39). There is nothing sexual about seeking after a sign but there was something disloyal about it in this case, hence the reference to it as adultery. James said that "friendship with the world" made them "adulterers and adulteresses." (James 4:4). There are just too many non-sexual uses of this word in scripture to hold that its only meaning is sexual activity by a married person with someone who is not their spouse.

Actually you don't have to go outside this verse (Mat. 19:9) to establish that the word can refer to something other than sexual

action. Here Jesus applied it to the two actions of **putting away a wife** and **marrying another**. When men arbitrarily assign a definition to the word which does not allow it to include what scripture applies it to, they have departed from the recognized procedure of determining word meanings according to the way they are used in the Bible. We cannot follow them in that course even though we have great respect for their scholarship. We appreciate their work in providing us with useful technical information, but God's word is still the final word, even in cases where it contradicts the most brilliant human minds. It is a fact that whoever puts away his wife, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery in so doing, regardless of who may argue that because these are not sex acts they cannot be adultery. Jesus said they are.

## THE MATTER OF INTERPRETATION

In our efforts to understand what the message is in this part of scripture, or any other, we do not need to begin by denying anything expressly stated in the text. Interpreting scripture statements is one thing. Denying what it says is another. Our first step must be to accept what is explicitly stated and proceed from there in trying to understand what the will of God is in the matter. This does not mean taking the verse in isolation and disregarding all other passages that speak on the subject as though this were the only one. What it does mean is accepting whatever is stated in this verse as being true, exactly as written, and putting that information into our container of facts, to be considered along with all that is said elsewhere in the Bible.

We cannot know we have arrived at precise truth until our conclusion can accept all Bible statements. As long as we hold to a position that necessitates denying any express Bible statement we still do not have it right. This is one of the most disturbing features of the traditional concept on this subject. It puts one into the position of having to deny, or at least modify, virtually everything said in

Matthew 19:3-12, as well as everything Paul wrote about the subject in First Corinthians, chapter seven.

In Matthew 19, the question at verse 3 gets changed to a question about "eligibility" to marry after divorce. They think that is what was being discussed here. The "joining together" of verse 4, which Jesus saw as the authorization of marriage at the beginning, gets changed to a special joining when each couple gets married. The order at verse 6, "Let not man put asunder," gets changed to "Man cannot put asunder." We have already noticed that every statement made in verse 9 is negated in that theory.

What Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7 is also negated. At verse 2 he said, "To avoid immorality, let every man have his own wife and let every woman have her own husband." This is refused by the traditionalists. Verses 10-11 are specifically addressed **"Unto the married."** But they are applied instead to the divorced. Verse 15 declares that one abandoned by an unbelieving mate is "not under bondage." But traditionalists insist they are under bondage to remain alone for the rest of life. Verse 28 states very simply that a man who was "loosed" from his wife does not sin if he marries. But this is rejected outright in the traditionalist concept. Romans 7:1-4 cannot be accepted because it authorizes another "marriage" for Israel, the divorced ex-wife of God, divorced for adultery, "the guilty party." We will have more to say on these passages later.

## THE ROLE OF THE APOSTLES AS THE FINAL REVELATORS

Jesus promised His apostles the guidance of the Holy Spirit and assigned them to be the final interpreters of His teaching. (John chapters 14-16). It is apostolic confirmation then that tells us we have a correct understanding of what the Lord said. But on this subject many of my brethren want to reverse that and have Jesus "interpret" and over rule what Paul said. Actually nothing Paul said has any disagreement with anything Jesus said. It does disagree, and most certainly so, with what they interpret Jesus to say.

Looking at the full context in Matthew 19 we find that the question raised was not "Is it lawful for divorced people to marry?" It is rather, **Is it lawful for married people to divorce? (Vs. 3)**. In verses 4-6 **putting asunder** is condemned but **marriage itself** is approved. Thus we conclude that Jesus was forbidding married people to divorce, not forbidding divorced people to marry. The only condemnation of marriage is where it is seen as part of breaking the first marriage. (Verse 9). Do we have Biblical confirmation of this understanding?

The apostle Paul did indeed confirm this. In 1 Cor. 7:10-12 he said he and the Lord spoke to the married. Then at verse 12 he said, "To the rest speak I, not the Lord."

## CONFIRMATION BY PAUL

- "Unto the married I command, yet not I but the Lord..." (Jesus did speak to (the married).
- "Let not the wife depart from her husband..."
- "To the rest speak I, not the Lord....." Jesus did not speak to the rest, i.e. the divorced. 1 Corinthians 7:10-12

What Jesus said to the married was "Do not depart," and "If you do, then remain unmarried or else be reconciled to your mate." If this is applied to the married, as addressed in the passage, it fits, since the obvious sense of the passage is "save your marriage." It is addressed, not to the married who divorce, but to the married who separate. Paul said here that Jesus did not speak to the other categories. It makes no sense to apply this to the divorced. They have no marriage to save.

## SCRIPTURE STATEMENTS VS. HUMAN THEORY

It does indeed come down to a matter of choosing between human theories and scripture statements. I would urge us to give serious thought to the idea that in our study of scripture we should always seek first to take the text at face value, to believe each statement as it is written. Certainly there are Bible verses in which we have to understand a figurative or symbolic meaning because the context (immediate or remote) compels it. Matthew 26:26-28 is an example. The book of Revelation, of course, is a large example.

But it is bad procedure to pick as our first choice an interpretation which modifies what a verse says, as symbolic or whatever, when there is no contextual factor making it necessary. That is bending the scripture to fit a theory that has assumption as its real foundation. In the case of the traditional position on divorce and remarriage the theory makes necessary such modification in virtually every verse relating to the subject. Here are several examples:

1. Matthew 19:9 states that one who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery. This is modified to say that he "enters an adulterous union" wherein he will commit adultery each time he engages in sexual activity with his wife.
2. Mark 10:11 states that the "adultery" in such a case is committed against the first wife. This is modified to say that he commits adultery with the second wife.
3. Paul states that the teaching of the Lord on this subject was addressed to the married and was intended to instruct them not to put asunder their marriage. Human theory modifies this to say that the words of Jesus are addressed to the divorced and are intended to instruct them not to marry.
4. Paul stated that marriage is God's will for all humans on earth, except those who do not need it, in order to avoid

immorality. Human theory says instead that marriage is God's will only for those who have never sinned against it.

5. The Bible says God hates putting away. (Mal. 2:16; Mat. 19:6 & 8) But tradition says that God hates marriage itself in the case of most divorcees.

Regardless of what good intentions may be there, this is entirely too much modifying for the conclusions to be a scriptural doctrine. And the rub really comes when one realizes that none of these modifications are mandated by any textual considerations. All of them are the product of human theory imposed arbitrarily.

On the other hand, the view we have set forth here as Biblical accepts every statement of scripture on the subject as being precisely correct as it is written in our standard English translations. "Adultery" is seen as occurring in the two acts of putting away and remarrying, just as the text says. It is seen as treachery against one's wife, as the text says, not an act of sexual intercourse with a subsequent wife. Adultery is an act committed, as the text says, not a condition lived in. Going from mate to mate is condemned. Being in a marriage and being faithful to it is approved. When one stops doing the former and starts doing the latter he has repented and reformed. Marriage is God's appointed "way of escape" by which people are enabled to "avoid fornication," just as Paul said. Marriage serves God's purposes, celibacy serves Satan's purposes.

All these facts are clearly and explicitly stated in the Bible. Yet all of them are being modified, or denied outright, by the advocates of tradition. It really does come down to a choice between scripture statements and human theory. I do not believe it is necessary to do anything to any scripture passage. We can and should accept every one of them exactly as they are written and apply them in the light of both the immediate and remote context. When we do that, in the full sense of it, the divorce-remarriage problem ceases to exist.

*(Incidentally, the Hebrew word "na'aph," equivalent to the Greek word translated "adultery" in Mat. 19:9, is translated "break wedlock" in Ezekiel 16:38 in the King James version.)*



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Why do traditionalists reject the actions of divorcing and marrying as being the adultery in Matthew 19:9?
2. What is the origin of our English word "adultery"? When did it first get into the Bible?
3. Is the sexual relationship in a second marriage mentioned in the text of Matthew 19:9?
4. Why do our English language dictionaries define the word "adultery" as a sex act, as a first definition?
5. Why do our modern dictionaries define the word "baptize" as denoting sprinkling, pouring, or immersing?
6. What is the difference between "an adulterous union" and an act of "committing adultery"?
7. Is the word "adultery" used in the Bible to refer to things other than a sex act?
8. What is the final determiner of word meanings as concerns the original languages of the Bible?
9. Should our first choice of interpretation of a verse be what it literally says, or a modification of it?
10. Is there any such thing as a position on the subject of divorce & remarriage that will allow one to accept all Bible statements on the subject literally, exactly as they are written?

# **7.**

## **A review of James O. Baird's "AND I SAY UNTO YOU"**

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We feel that conflicting viewpoints on the divorce - remarriage subject can best be illustrated and clarified by placing the premises alongside each other and looking at how each position applies the scripture differently. This is what we want to do here. We chose this particular book for several reasons.

1. It sets forth a position more representative of the majority of traditional advocates now than either the extremely sacrament oriented books of Thomas Warren or the antithesis to that by Lusk and Gross.
2. This book is small enough to be practical in content and easily available to anyone who might want to read it in full. (88 pages).
3. It is written with more maturity and less sarcasm than most books on that side of the question and with an absence of personal reflection that is admirable.
4. This book has received wide circulation and acceptance among brethren of the traditional persuasion. I believe a majority of folks will want to see whether or not it can be adequately answered.

In the course of this review you will find that all the major premises which constitute the real issues occur in the book "And I Say Unto You." We will point them out and discuss each one carefully. It is with this purpose in view that we offer this review, to illuminate and clarify, not to embarrass or discredit its author. May the reader always keep in mind that it is not who is right that is important but what is right.

## **THE BOOK BEGINS WITH AN APPEAL FOR OPEN MINDS**

In this particular controversy virtually every writer claims for himself that he is 1. Loyal to scripture and 2. Fully objective. Most of them suggest that folks who disagree with them are somehow biased and therefore not loyal to scripture. It is standard procedure to say that circumstances are influencing their judgment.

James Baird begins his book in this very typical manner, but not in an impolite way. On page 1 he says, "In a just concern to be helpful there seems to be, because of the rapid increase of divorce as it

affects the church, a growing tendency to weaken the impact of Christ's words in Mat. 19:4-12." His judgment then, is that those of us who differ with his conclusions are motivated by "the rapid increase of divorce as it affects the church" and by our desire to help people who are in that situation.

Somehow this does not seem to be an objective way to begin what professes to be a fair examination of opposing viewpoints. It does not seem appropriate to make a judgment of motives before proving anything nor does it do anything towards clarifying what the issues in question are. But writers for the traditional view almost always begin their articles and books in that way.

We have been asking truth seekers to lay aside all biases and prejudgments as far as possible, and just look at the Biblical facts. We make that appeal again here. Surely none of us would deny that we feel compassion for the large number of people who experience the devastation of divorce and would like to help. But the idea that our viewpoint is based on that instead of express Bible statements, calls for proof, some evidence to sustain it. If what we are saying does not occur in the Bible, then such a judgment might be justified. But if it turns out that what we are saying is stated in scripture and that of the opposition is not, the shoe might be seen to be on the other foot. Anyway, this seems to be brother Baird's starting point.

As one reads on through the book it looks like the shoe really is on the other foot. It develops that brother Baird himself keeps bringing up the matter of the numbers involved and he indicates that it is a part of his motivation. On page 6 he says, "As a prelude to a more careful study of divorce and remarriage, it is probably good to review the magnitude of the problem today." Then, after reviewing the magnitude of the problem, near the end of that section, he cites that very thing as a reason why the study is badly needed. "In summary, conditions today make it imperative that Christians diligently study Biblical teaching concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage."

It is right to appeal for objectivity when we try to communicate our ideas. But we must see to it that we practice it ourselves. Any decision on what to accept as God's will is always important, not because many people are involved or few, but because God is involved. What His word states is true and that will not be affected by our attitude toward it. Jesus said that to teach for doctrines the commandments of men is to worship in vain, (Mat. 15:9) and added, "If the blind lead the blind both shall fall into the ditch." (Vs. 14). So our concern has to be for what the Bible text says, for this is the only thing that determines truth absolutely.

Nevertheless, to set the record straight, this writer has never argued that "the difficulty in obeying God's laws" ever justifies setting aside anything God's word says. I have absolute confidence in our shepherd and for me His directives are the only ones that carry weight. The chief reason I reject brother Baird's concept is not that it is difficult to obey but rather the fact that it is not the Lord's directive. Not only does it not occur in scripture, it contradicts everything Jesus did say and also what the apostles wrote later.

Neither have I had a divorce in my own life to influence my thinking and the same is true of my wife. At the time of publishing this new edition of this book, (January, 1997), we have already celebrated 51 years of marriage to one mate.

So let us forget about all prejudicial considerations and approach the Bible with the realization that it is God's eternal word and the greatest benefits to us will be gained if we read it accurately. The question at issue is not whether the high divorce rate is right or whether the widespread moral decay of our time is right. The question at issue is, What does God's word order to be done in response to the problem? What is God's will for people who have been involved in marriage breaking?

## **ANOTHER AUTHORITY STANDARD EMERGES**

In our first chapter here, we raised the question of what the standard of measurement should be. That is because in the course of this controversy we have become aware that a different authority standard is being used other than pure Bible statements. Brother Baird's first major point brings up that question.

On page 13 the issue of the meaning of the word "adultery" is addressed, particularly the matter of whether this verb means "continuous action." The author says, "We cannot definitely determine from the form of the verb...whether the action is a one time matter or a continuing state. Greek grammarians do not consider it a one time or punctiliar action; rather they give it the meaning of continuing (or durative) action."

This is completely incorrect. Among all the Bible translations commonly accepted among us today, not a single one gives it a continuing action meaning. If it were a present infinitive they would, or perhaps an imperative, or a participle. But it is not any of these mood types that might justify that. It is a present tense verb in the indicative mood, which scholars agree is a type that could accommodate either linear or punctiliar, but most often is punctiliar. (For a full explanation of this see A.T. Robertson's manual - page 864). Why would brother Baird say that scholars give it a meaning of continuous action, especially after just admitting that such could not be determined from the form of the verb?

Even more remarkably he then insists that the meaning has to be linear because "If the one act of adultery occurs with the performance of the remarriage ceremony, this gives a new definition, certainly, to the meaning of adultery. A marriage ceremony can be a part of an adulterous union but is not per se adultery."

This illustrates our point. These brethren do not stick with the simple "Thus saith the Lord" as a procedure. Here is a passage in which the statement is that **whoever puts away his wife, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery**. But brother Baird questions what the adultery consists of and whether it is linear action or punctiliar action. The decision he gives on it is not based on the statement of the text. It is based on what he already holds as a concept. His definition of the word "adultery" as exclusively sexual runs counter to the Bible statement. So he interprets the verse according to his "definition," not according to what it says. What Jesus said the man commits in doing those two things, brother Baird says cannot be committed that way. The standard of measurement he is using is the human definition, not the Bible statement.

To keep the record straight, it is true that neither a linear nor a punctiliar meaning can be determined just by the form of this word, because in the **indicative mood** the same stem accommodates both. But when the passage itself stipulates what the actions in view are, then it can be determined simply by reading that stipulation. But when one reads in the text that adultery is committed by anyone who does two specific acts, puts away his wife and marries another, and then says, "Adultery cannot be committed that way," this is a problem of authority standard.

On page 77 brother Baird argues the same way again but this lame des mis that present tense verb can refer to a one time act, and says, "The context must guide us in deciding which is meant." Now this is correct! So why don't we do that? Because brother Baird and others who hold the view he does, do not accept what the context in this case says the action consists of. He arbitrarily moves the "adultery" from the two actions specified in the context over to the subsequent marital relationship. Since the sexual activity in the following marriage is not even mentioned in this passage, if we "Let the context guide us in deciding." what will that decision be? If the

express statements of scripture were truly our final authority standard, this is the course we would take.

All those who forbid marriage to the divorced hold a concept that rests on an incorrect assumption, not borne out in scripture, Le that "adultery" always consists of sexual action and therefore could not refer to the two actions stipulated in Mat. 19:9. They all argue from that. It is a premise that will not stand up under comparison with the many different ways that word is used in the Bible. That the word can be used to refer to a sexual action is not disputed. But that a sex act is its only meaning, is simply not true. We need to always let the text say what it says, in this case that putting away an innocent wife and marrying another constitutes adultery. This remains true regardless of how many men deny it.

## **INNOCENT & GUILTY: BOTH FORBIDDEN TO MARRY**

Throughout the book it is contended that the only divorced persons who can marry again are those who did the divorcing and that on grounds of fornication. They think Jesus said that.

But that idea is a traditional theory, not a Bible statement. If one looks at the text carefully it is found that the "fornication" of Matthew 19:9 is given as a condition for divorcing, not a condition for eligibility to marry. But their usage of it will mean that people divorced against their will and without reason, innocent of any wrongdoing, must be sentenced to celibacy for the rest of their lives, forbidden to marry, even if they did everything they could to try to save the marriage. That says God holds them responsible for what their mate did over which they had no control, which is the exact opposite of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7:15.

Brother Baird says plainly that guilt or innocence makes absolutely no difference in the matter. Near the bottom of page 39 he says, "We do not place this demand on the guilty; God does. Also Mt. 5:31, 32, as well as Mt. 19:9 binds celibacy upon the innocent." Then,



incredibly, on the next page he argues that "The way of the transgressor is hard." But these are not transgressors. These are innocent people! He is arguing that their way has to be just as hard!

This is argued again on page 41 at "Reason G" as well as other places in his book. There is no doubt that it is the author's intention to forbid marriage to people innocently divorced against their will, as well as to fornicators and those guilty of other violations against marriage. Of course he insists that God orders this. But no such order exists in God's word. It is deduced from faulty human assumptions. Neither is there a single example of such a thing being imposed on anyone in scripture. The premises on which it is based contradict what Jesus said. It was not God who said that adultery occurs in the sexual activity of a marriage that follows divorce. It was human legislators. What the Lord said it occurs in is the dual actions of putting away one and marrying another. Brother Baird's premise is not textually supported and his conclusion has no Biblical precedent to confirm it.

Although brother Baird frequently expresses concern about the prevalence of divorce in our time, and that is a legitimate concern. But the more one reads in his book the more it becomes clear that what this man is really against is marriage itself. His argumentation seems to always be aimed at this target and seems to reach for any possible interpretation that would deny marriage to as many as possible. At least so it appears to me.

I am not suggesting ulterior motives. There has been a concept prevalent for many centuries which has as its hub a basic suspicion about the rightness of sexual relationships, even in marriage. It has been manifested in Catholic, Protestant, and independent theologies, and many religious leaders throughout history have exhibited it in their thinking. If a man's conscience has been oriented that way, perhaps since childhood, he is likely to give deference to it in his thought processes. This does not mean he wants to deprive someone or see them suffer. It is a very real fear and a pretty

common one. But the point that concerns our investigation is the fact that there is no foundation in scripture for such a fear. Instead there is clear and repeated assurance in the opposite direction.

The human sex drive is given of God, just as is the capacity to love and the need to be loved. But these are susceptible to sinful misuse and that is what Satan wants. Fulfillment of them in the right way is also given of God, to avoid the sinful misuses, and men need to learn how important this is.

In Matthew 19:4-6 Jesus spelled out clearly the approval of God, given at the creation, for the "one flesh" relationship in marriage. God approves it fully. Jesus also said, "What God has joined together, let not man put asunder." The divine order then is Practice marriage but do not break it. This concept is spelled out again in Hebrews 13:4, both ends of it. "Marriage is honorable in all and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. "In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul urged at verses 3-5 that the husband give due attention to his wife's needs and the wife give attention to the needs of her husband. At verse 5 the command is, "Do not defraud (or deprive) except briefly, by mutual consent, and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency." (Lack of self control). Obviously marriage can only serve God's purpose of preventing immorality if it includes a healthy sexual practice.

But brother Baird does not see marriage as universally authorized for every man and every woman. On page 35 he says, "God planned marriage, established its bounds, and bestowed the state of marriage as a right given by Him to certain individuals upon the meeting of certain conditions." Concerning divorced persons he added: "Whether or not either party can marry again depends on whether or not God gives either, or both, that right." Then he said, "The right to marry, which God bestows on the human race, (Gen. 2: 18-24, 1 Cor. 7:28) is a contingent right, that is, it is dependent on certain conditions." He offers 1 Cor. 7:10-11 as evidence. But that passage is specifically addressed to the woman who is already

married, "Unto the married I command..." Thus it does not fit the application he makes of it here to the divorced. This divine instruction is not addressed to the formerly married who divorce. It is addressed to the married who separate. ("choridzo").

This then is a fundamental issue between us. We disagree on it. The truth is to be decided by what the word of God says about it. Does God authorize marriage for the entire human race, or only for those who "qualify" by never having misused it?

## **OTHER ALTERED "DEFINITIONS"**

In the traditional theory several words have to be given altered, different meanings. On page 8 in defining the word "divorce," brother Baird says, "Thinking about this term requires wearing two hats." To fit their theory it does. But the "two meanings" concept of this word is an idea that originated back in medieval history, not in the Bible.

When Catholic theologians accepted the sacrament theory of marriage it resulted in assigning this dual meaning both to the word "divorce" and the word "marriage." The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia reports that change this way: "The theory of the sacramental nature of wedlock had two consequences which involved the whole medieval problem of separation and divorce. First was the dogma of the indissolubility of the marriage bond and second, the exclusive jurisdiction of the church in matrimonial causes." (Vol. 3, pg.453). The article then says that the word "divorce" came to be used in two senses, "neither of which harmonizes with its ancient and right meaning as a complete dissolution of the bond of true wedlock." The two meanings cited are 1. A separation of husband and wife from the marriage relationship but they are still married as God sees it, and 2. A declaration of nullity of a spurious marriage that is voidable "because of some flaw in the couple's qualification for marriage."

Brother Baird follows these alterations precisely. That is why his thinking about the term "divorce" requires wearing two hats. The same thing is true also in his view of the word "marry," or "marriage." In the previous paragraph on page 7 he speaks of "God approved marriage" and "God disapproved marriage." With these definitions in place, and they are foundational to his theory, he then proceeds to lay the final block in the foundation, the "definition" of the word "adultery." Not only does he define it as always a sex act or a figure thereof, he also makes it mean an action that continues in progress. On page 13 he admits of the Mat. 19:9 case, "It is true that he marries another, but the marriage is adulterous." (3rd paragraph). In this way the case of a man whom Jesus said "commits adultery" is changed into a case of a man who "enters an adulterous union."

On the next page (14) it is explained a bit more fully; "Aside from death (Rom. 7:3) or fornication by one's mate, once married a person cannot have sexual relations with another without committing adultery. The adultery exists with or without another marriage ceremony, with or without approval of the law of the state."

## **INCONSISTENCIES**

A few years ago writers and debaters who promoted the traditional position on divorce and remarriage stated clearly the premises they based it on. They said openly that after unscriptural divorce the two are "still married in God's sight" and that when either entered another marriage they were "not married to the next mate in God's sight." But in recent years, since we have called attention to the contradiction between this and what Jesus said, apologists for that position have been trying to avoid that contradiction but they are still determined to hold to their conclusions. This necessitates a juggling act that usually ends up involving them in inconsistencies and contradictions besides the denying of express Bible statements.

That is the route brother Baird takes and his problem is compounded.

On pages 7 & 8 in defining the words "Marriage" and "divorce" he introduces the medieval concept that there are two kinds of each. But instead of using the phrase "in God's sight" he lists them as "God approved" and "God disapproved." Throughout the rest of the book this is the terminology he uses while trying to prove that the second marriage is actually "an illicit relationship" though it is called "marriage" in the Bible.

In several places he says enough to reveal that his meaning is really the same as earlier apologists, i.e. that God sees the first marriage as still binding and the second marriage as not actual. On page 15 for example, he says, "Even though the one put away was innocent of adultery herself, for anyone to marry her after she has been put away is to commit adultery. Apparently God still looks at the first union as the one which He has formed."

On page 35 he gives this explanation: "Marriage, if God approved (and this is the type of marriage we are discussing) is more than a civil contract. Two people, in marriage, are bound to each other and at the same time bound to the law of God."

In the next paragraph (par. 5) he continues, "A marriage may be broken by divorce but the two people involved, although free from each other, are not free from the law of God."

Now that's a fancy bit of toe dancing! Has anyone ever said that marriage breaking has God's approval? The very point of Mat. 19:9 is that it is wrong to do that. Of course it doesn't have God's approval. The issue is not whether it is wrong but whether it is possible. In an effort to avoid contradicting the passage, brother Baird acknowledges that the man in the case does divorce his wife and is not bound to her, but is bound, he says, to the law of God. That concedes the point at issue. To say that he is not still married to that wife but is still bound to the law of God is simply to say that the

marriage is indeed destroyed and he is responsible for destroying it. That is precisely what we have been contending that the verse says!

Certainly this man has violated the law of God. He has broken his vows to his wife and committed adultery against her. God condemns the doing of that just like He condemns murder. But that is a long way from saying that he did not actually break the marriage and did not actually marry the second wife. If a man murders someone, would it make any sense to say, "He isn't really dead because God forbids murder? Or to use brother Baird's terminology, "because his death was not God approved"?

When someone is killed, whether by accident or by foul play, the procedures that follow have to be carried out on the basis of what is real. The man is dead! A funeral is held, estate matters are settled, and the family makes plans for life without that person. If it was murder the killer is answerable to the courts for his crime. He has violated the law. Even if civil authorities excuse him he is still answerable to God. But to interpret that as meaning that the man he killed is not really dead "in the eyes of God," is utter foolishness. The funeral that follows the death is not part of the murder, nor is the future life of the survivors.

The same is true when a marriage has been "killed." God's law has been violated. That remains the case whether civil law was violated or not. The person has disobeyed the Lord and is responsible to God for it. That is not a question here. No one disputes it. But the application being made of it, that it means that some of the things in the scenario are not actual, certainly is questioned.

When a marriage has been destroyed those involved must proceed with their lives on the basis of that reality. It is absurd to think they must remain bound as if the marriage had not been destroyed. The net result of that would be, since that marriage no longer exists, that they are without a marriage in actuality. Celibacy is what this is, and brother Baird calls it that freely in his book. That is the honest thing to do because that is what it is.

Realistically, the procedure insisted on by traditionalists is not a saving of any marriage. It is the preventing of another marriage. It does nothing to correct the wrongs that were done in destroying the marriage. It merely prevents any healing, rehabilitation, or new start in life for the persons involved. It is not corrective of anything. It is punitive. It declares a life long "ineligibility for marriage" both for the one who destroyed the marriage and for the innocent one to whom this was done.

Near the bottom of page 78 his actual meaning is quite clear in this statement: "Since God cannot be a partner to sin (Ps. 145:17) we know that God does not approve those who are not eligible by His standards to be joined. Others may marry legally but they are not in marriages which have God's approval."

Rewording an erroneous proposition does not make it the truth. This is still the old "sacrament" theory of Catholic tradition. Regardless of the terminology used to express it, or perhaps disguise it, the notion that God made unscriptural divorce impossible and therefore another unpardonable sin, is entirely an invention of human minds. It rests on premises that were assumed in medieval times, not on Bible statements. The conclusions produced and the judgments imposed have no precedent in scripture but rather contradict what is stated there. It is not difficult to see if one opens his mind enough to understand what is being said and compares that with Bible statements.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Is it right to be concerned about the prevalence of divorce in our time?
2. Should we choose a position on divorce & remarriage based on the numbers involved?
3. Are we justified in setting aside any requirement of scripture because "It is just too hard to carry that out"?
4. Which is best, to understand the word "adultery" the way the Bible uses it, or take an arbitrary human definition and reshape the scriptures to fit that?
5. Is it true that the indicative mood is the least likely of all present tense verbs to ever denote continuous action? (See A.T. Robertson's grammar, pg. 864; Dana & Mantey, page 181, first paragraph).
6. Does brother Baird's position forbid marriage only to those guilty of marriage breaking, or does it also forbid marriage to those innocent of that and who were divorced against their will?
7. In the traditional view, is the real force of opposition against divorce, or against marriage itself?
8. Is the fear of sexual activity in marriage Biblical?
9. Did God authorize marriage for the whole human race, or only for those who have never misused it?
10. Does the word "divorce" and the word "marriage" have two meanings? "As God sees it" and "as men see it"?
11. Has the church been authorized to judge the matter of "valid" or "invalid" marriages and on "marriage eligibility"?
12. Does preventing another marriage correct the wrongs involved in breaking the first marriage?



# 8.

## A Significant Book Review Continued

### MATTHEW 19:10-12 CONTRADICTED

When the disciples heard Jesus speak the words of Mat. 19:9 they said, "If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry." They were yet uninspired at this point in time and subject to error. Whatever their reasoning may have been the suggestion they offered was celibacy... "It is better not to marry."

They may have meant it is better not to marry in the case under consideration, that is, after divorce. If so their mistake would be the same as that of brother Baird. He has deduced that also. Or they may have meant it is better not to marry in the first place because the idea of an "exchange privilege" has just been pronounced wrong.

Regardless of the basis for it, this deduction was wrong and Jesus reacted to it negatively. In essence, what He said was that it is unworkable because of the way humans are designed. The first thing He said was "All men cannot receive this saying save they to whom it is given." He then pointed out that some are "eunuchs" and some are not. Then He said, "He that is able to receive it let him receive it. "If anything was ever declared optional, this is. The statement begins and ends with that stipulation. Sandwiched between the two is the reason why it has to be optional, some are eunuchs and some are not. In other words, a eunuch can accept celibacy, others cannot.

But brother Baird follows instead the theory advanced by Warren, Connally, Deaver and others, and concludes the opposite, that celibacy is the only way open for some people, regardless of whether they are eunuchs or not. If ever there was a direct denial of a plain scripture statement, this one is. He virtually admits this on page 15 as he says "In a broader sense, as Jesus used it, the word included those who voluntarily denied themselves sexual activity." Near the end of the page he added, "Even though these words were spoken regarding the first marriage, i.e. not expedient to marry, the teaching regarding making oneself a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake is certainly a viable option for those in a divorced situation."

Here one needs to call to mind again what the point is that is in dispute. We are not disputing about "viable options." It is forced celibacy without option that the author under review is trying to prove. That is what we challenge. It contradicts all scriptures on the point, including this one, Matthew 19:10-12. As far as I know we all agree that a voluntary choice to forego marriage because one believes he can serve God better that way, is scripturally approved. (1 Cor. 7:32-33). But that is not in the ball park with the notion of compelling couples to destroy their marriages and live celibate lives who do not believe they are "ineligible" and who do not "volunteer" for that at all. It is not in the ball park with the doctrine that compels a healthy young man to take a vow of life long celibacy because he has been divorced, on threat of excommunication if he ever marries.

On page 74 brother Baird states more openly that this is his intention. He says, "It is a passage with many implications and its chief teaching is that celibacy is a possible life style (and perhaps the only way) for some people." All through the book he keeps referring to this point with this kind of ambiguity, i.e. that it is a possible life style, and parenthetically, the only way for some. Remarkably he offers passages where voluntary celibacy is approved as evidence to prove compulsory celibacy.

It is difficult to see how a statement about this choice that both begins and ends with a declaration that it is optional, can be seen as teaching that it is "the only way of life open to some people." The very first thing Jesus said about it was that "Not all men can receive that saying." The last thing He said about it was, "He that can receive it let him receive it."

The simple truth of the matter is that the parts of this passage that say it is optional are being contradicted. When one says that celibacy is a viable option for those who so choose, he says what the Lord said. But when one says that celibacy is the only way of life open to some people, he contradicts what the Lord said. He also contradicts what Paul said about it. (1 Cor. 7:7-9).

## **OTHER CONTRADICTIONS OF BIBLE STATEMENTS**

We have already pointed out that brother Baird's theory denies every statement of Mat. 19:9. The Lord spoke of a man who puts away his wife, not for fornication and brother Baird says it doesn't actually happen. Jesus said the man then "marries another" and brother Baird says God does not accept that. The passage then says that whoever does those two things commits adultery but brother Baird says adultery cannot be committed that way and what the man really does is to enter an adulterous relationship. Once this passage is thus revised it lays the foundation for contradicting every statement made by the apostles on the subject, no matter how explicitly they are given.

The Holy Spirit, in guiding the apostles into all truth as the final revelators of the will of Christ, did not guide them to say anything like what the traditional theory says Jesus meant. The fact is it was hundreds of years after their time that men introduced the "sacrament" theory of marriage, which has caused these misinterpretations. But strange as it may seem, when the traditionalists come to passages in which the apostles contradict their viewpoint, instead of accepting that as an indication that they have misunderstood the Lord, they reject the statement on the ground that "this is a contradiction of Mt. 19:9 and 5:32." (Pg. 45 and others). This is in discussion of 1 Cor. 7:15 where Paul said that if a believer is deserted by an unbelieving mate, "the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases." Brother Baird insists that the believer is still under bondage to that marriage and not free to marry again. Otherwise he thinks Mat. 19:9 and 5:32 would be contradicted.

This reverses the procedure Jesus ordered of having the apostles interpret Him and instead tries to make Jesus interpret Paul. The truth is these apostolic statements do not contradict what Jesus said. They do indeed contradict the misunderstanding these men have of what He said. But if Paul's statements be taken exactly as written and the statements of Jesus be taken exactly as written, there is no disharmony and no need whatsoever to try to bend either one to fit the other. The conflicts are caused by the speculations of men, not by what is actually said.

## **THE WORD "BONDAGE" AND THE WORD "MARRIAGE"**

On page 47, in an effort to negate Paul's statement of 1 Cor. 7:15, an argument is offered that the word translated "bondage," which is a form of "doulou," is not used in scripture in reference to the marriage bond and that "deo" is so used. So he concludes that Paul had in mind some other kind of bondage here.

This is irresponsible. It is nothing short of manipulation to suggest that either the Greek word "deo" or the word "douloo" has anything to do with marriage in its meaning. The Greek word for marriage is "**gamos**," not "deo" or "douloo." These two words simply mean bound. That is all they mean. To discover what it is that one is bound to you have to look at what the context is talking about. The word "bound" itself does not tell you.

Does the use of "deo" indicate that the marriage bond is in view? This word occurs in the Greek New Testament 44 times. In only 3 instances does it occur in a passage where marriage is the subject. Even then it is known that marriage is the subject because of other words in the context that say so, not because "deo" occurs there. To illustrate how the word is used: It occurs in Mat. 14:3 to connote that John the Baptist was "bound" in the common prison. This does not mean that John was married to the prison. Obviously the word "deo" does not mean marriage. It simply means bound.

Is it true that "douloo" is not appropriate in a passage where marriage is under consideration? Ironically, in defining this word Thayer cites this very passage (1 Cor. 7:15) to illustrate its meaning as "To be under bondage, held by constraint of law in some matter." (Lexicon, pg. 158). So Thayer thought it referred to a legal bondage from which one is released, not just the obligation to be faithful to Christ.

The only bondage discussed in the context of 1 Corinthians 7:15 is the marriage bond. In the verses immediately preceding Paul tells the believer who is married to an unbeliever to stay in the marriage if the unbeliever is willing. Then in contrast to that he says, "If the unbeliever departs, let him depart" and that the believer is not under bondage in such cases. Obviously the bondage the believer is under if the mate stays is the same bondage he is not under if the mate leaves. How could it be reasoned that Paul, right in the middle of this lengthy discussion about marriage matters, suddenly switched to

another subject without saying so and expected the reader to know that?

I believe brother R. L. Whiteside had it right when he said that the refusal to accept what this passage says is due to a preconceived notion that Mat. 19:9 says otherwise. He said, "If his future actions are in any way limited by his former marriage, then he is still bound by that marriage, is still under bondage. To me the language means that the brother or sister is as free as if he or she had never been married. What else can the passage mean? If we did not have our minds made up another way the passage would mean to us just what it says." (Reflections, pg. 416). Two pages later he said, "The language is so plain that no other view would ever have been entertained had not people gone to the text with their minds made up."

Brother Baird in essence acknowledges going in that his mind is made up in that way, that he sees Mat. 19:9 (his interpretation of it) as the total word of God on the matter and anything else said elsewhere in the Bible must bend to fit that. His second chapter is entitled, "**Mt. 19:3-9, A KEY SCRIPTURE.**" There he makes the statement "Mt. 19:3-9 is the longest single statement in scripture about marriage, divorce, and remarriage." (Pg. 10). This is not true of course. The entire 7th chapter of 1 Corinthians is on that subject. But brother Baird rejects most of that so his fixation with his theories about Mat. 19 is not surprising. Several other times he refers to that passage as "central" and then near the end of the book he says, "It has not been our purpose to try to answer every objection to the centrality of Mt. 19:9 in understanding divorce and remarriage, but we acknowledge that its truth stands." (Pg. 84). Then to further illustrate that he recognizes no other portions of scripture in the matter he adds, "We might even wish the Lord had given us more specific understanding for some of the very complicated problems in which people are involved regarding their marriages. However, since He did not, we know that he revealed what is best in His wisdom..."

We could wish the author had taken more of his own advice which he gives in what he says next, "it is our obligation to acknowledge and uphold what is revealed." In his final paragraph on page 85 he says, "Therefore as congregations grapple with problems regarding divorce and remarriage, they must do it reflecting respect for our Lord's teaching as set forth in Mt. 19:9. It has long been our plea, as followers of the Lord, that we should abide by what is written and make our course as safe as we can." Then his total restriction to this one verse, and that misunderstood, is demonstrated again in his very last statement, "Mt. 19:9 is the safe course for all marriages." What if we said, "1 Cor. 7:8-9 is the safe course for all people"?

Indeed it has long been our plea as followers of the Lord that we should abide by what is written and strive to make our course as safe as we can. But this means accepting ALL that is written in the word of God. We have tried to avoid the errors that come about when men lift out certain selected verses and interpret them in such a way as to array scripture against scripture. This has been our chief criticism of denominationalism. But now my brethren who embrace the theories of tradition on this subject are doing exactly that. Surely they do not realize what they do.

It would be true that "Mt. 19:9 is a safe course for all marriages," only if the verse is read correctly, allowed to say what it says, and the interpretations of the apostles are considered and respected. But neither Mt. 19:9 nor any other verse remains "the safe course" after men distort it and reshape it to such an extent that it is made to contradict the rest of the Bible. No passage, even correctly read, should be taken alone as the only statement of God on a matter if there are other passages that speak on the subject. Many errors are popular throughout the religious world simply because the Bible is mishandled in that way.

This kind of mishandling of scripture is no more right for us than it is for others. We can see it on them. We must see it on ourselves. The suggestion brother Baird offers, that congregations should grapple

with the problems regarding divorce and remarriage by taking just this verse and forcing the traditional misreading of it upon the lives of the people involved, is very bad advice and not a "safe course" at all.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. What was the response of Jesus when the disciples suggested celibacy in Mat. 19:10? ("It is not good to marry.")
2. Is there a difference between voluntary celibacy and celibacy that is forced? Which does the Bible approve? Which does it condemn?
3. Does the statement of 1 Cor. 7:15 that a deserted brother or sister is "not under bondage" contradict Mat. 19:9?
4. Does the word "doulou," translated "bondage" in 1 Cor. 7:15, have a meaning that refers to any specific kind of bondage? Does the word "deo," translated "bound" in 1 Cor. 7:39, have a meaning that refers to any specific bondage such as marriage?
5. What is the Greek word for "marriage"?
6. In any given verse concerning a bondage, how does one find out whether or not the bondage in view is marriage?
7. Should a person make decisions on the divorce - remarriage subject based only Matthew 19:9?
8. Is it true that the Lord did not provide us with any further information on divorce and remarriage beyond Matthew 19:9?
9. What do you think of the statement "Mt. 19:9 is the safe course for all marriages"?
10. Can it be said that 1 Cor. 7:8-9 prescribes a "safe course" for all people? Should any scripture passage be taken alone, isolated from other scriptures that deal with the same point?

# 9.

## Summary of Fundamental Errors

James O. Baird's book "And I Say Unto You," is suitable for our review because it reflects the typical mistakes in basics that are made by most advocates of the traditional perspective on divorce and remarriage. These mistakes are not due to any lack of scholarship or capability, as with most of those brethren. As we mentioned early in our review, they seem to focus on the gross moral decay of today's society, along with the huge number of divorces, and go into something of a panic. At the beginning of brother Baird's book a good sized section is spent reviewing that situation, which he cites as a primary reason the subject needs to be studied. Whether or not we can fully understand the reasons for the errors, here is a summary of some of the more significant ones:

## **1. Failure to correctly identify the question**

Advocates of the traditional view invest a lot of argumentation on "The intended permanence of marriage," as though that were an issue in question. Brother Baird's entire first chapter is devoted to that. But it is a false issue. The wrongness of marriage breaking and God's disapproval of it is not questioned. The current prevalence of divorce is repulsive to students on all sides of this controversy. It is wrong to suggest that we who disagree with their theories are contributors to that situation. Our position is actually more fully opposed to divorce than theirs. It is marriage itself that really is their target.

## **2. Failure to grasp the vital nature of marriage in human life**

The premises of tradition are designed to focus on preventing marriage for divorced people, not preventing divorce directly. In his book brother Baird never says that an unscriptural divorce has to be undone but rather says the opposite, "...a life of celibacy is clearly imposed on the innocent." (Pg. 55). He does agree that it is wrong to divorce but obviously feels that it can be forgiven even if it is not undone. But he insists throughout that the subsequent marriage has to be undone, else forgiveness of sins in regard to forming it cannot be obtained.

This reflects a failure to realize how vital marriage always has been in God's plan for moral purity on earth. When God created the very first man He said, "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make a helpmeet for him." (Gen. 2:18). The reason it is not generally a viable option for people to live alone is the fact that sexual activity is right only in marriage. This is one of the strongest drives in mankind, and since it is common, the essentiality of marriage, as God stated it, is common. Jesus recognized it. When the apostles said, "Maybe it is not good to marry." He said, "Not all men can receive that saying." Brother Baird's insistence that people in general can receive it and that "God's power will enable us" to do such a thing

(pg.40) does not make it so. Jesus is right in saying that not everyone can receive that saying.

Paul said the same at 1 Cor. 7:8-9. Three times in the space of 9 verses he cites the same basic reason why marriage is God's way for every man and every woman. At verse 2, "To avoid fornication." At verse 5, "That Satan tempt you not for your lack of self control." At verse 9, "For it is better to marry than to burn."

No wonder Paul would say to Timothy that when men begin to forbid marriage they have departed from the faith and are giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. (1 Tim. 4:1-3). When we stand in opposition against **breaking marriage**, we stand where Jesus stood and where the apostles stood. But when we stand opposed to **marriage itself** then we have left Biblical ground and are standing with Satan in his purpose that fornication be released to run rampant by getting marriage out of people's lives. This is why he wants marriages broken in the first place. Then when that is achieved he wants to lock it in place, to prevent any healing or repair for the people involved. That he can so often get Gospel preachers and elders to help bring about such a destructive and evil situation is remarkable.

### **3. Altering or rejecting apostolic interpretations**

As brother Whiteside said, the statements of the apostle Paul are very clear and explicit to the effect that God has appointed marriage for the moral purity of the human race, including those who have been abandoned by a mate or who have sinned against marriage in the past. But when men have preconceived misunderstandings about what Jesus said in Mat. 19:9 and they bring these to the text of Paul's writings, they reverse the correct procedure. We are to look to the apostles as the final revelators of the will of Christ, not the other way around. To try to make Jesus the interpreter of the apostles is to invite misunderstanding. A mistake about what Jesus said cannot then be clarified.

If Paul did not understand Jesus to be forbidding marriage to divorced people, we can know of a surety that theories which end up saying He did, are incorrect. But brother Baird, typical of those brethren, holds to his misunderstanding of Jesus and with that seeks to over rule what the apostle said.

#### **4. We must consider all scriptures that apply**

Those of us who hold that baptism is a part of God's plan for man's redemption, have long criticized those who do not see that for the practice of looking only at passages where grace and faith are emphasized, and disregarding passages where baptism is stressed. Some even reverse this and look only at passages where baptism is emphasized and disregard passages that amplify grace and faith. Either way it results in misunderstanding.

Precisely the same thing is true when in the study of divorce and remarriage one looks only at Mat. 19:9 and disregards other passages where the universal authorization of marriage is emphasized. This can lead to a misreading even of the verse we do consider and certainly it can lead to conclusions not Biblically justified.

#### **5. We must not assume anything**

As teachers and advisers of our fellow travelers in this life we have grave responsibilities to make sure that we "speak as the oracles of God." We abdicate that responsibility when we presume to place into the divine message any ingredient for which there is no Bible statement. The entire traditional concept on this subject has for its foundation premises which are assumed without textual support. The notion that "divorce" is seen differently "in God's eyes" than in man's eyes is purely assumed. On page 8 brother Baird defines divorce as meaning "To let loose from." But in regard to Mat. 19:9 he says God sees the man who does that as not being let loose from. In the same way the Greek word for "marry" means to take a wife or

husband. But concerning Mat. 19:9 these brethren say that the one who does that does not actually take a wife as God sees it. How do they know God sees it that way? And the idea that "adultery" can only be committed in sexual ways is contrary to its common Bible usage. These are all assumptions, yet they are the foundation stones upon which brother Baird builds his case in his book. That is not the way to fulfill one's responsibility as a teacher of God's word.

## **CONCLUSION OF THE BOOK REVIEW**

In the reading of brother Baird's book I was impressed by the almost total omission of grace, mercy, and the forgiving love of God. This may be the most serious mistake of all. In my experiences with traditional brethren I have found this consistently true. Their deliberations do not seem to include this factor and their conclusions do not allow for it.

In the book under review here I found no place where grace or forgiveness could be included. Instead there is painted a picture of hopelessness, a situation for which there cannot be a remedy, ever, for the divorced person. He mentioned God's mercy and grace three times, if I counted right, but each time it was only to say that he did not know what place it has in this matter or even if it has a place. For example, near the end, on page 95, he said, "It has not been our purpose in this book to attempt to explain where, or if, God's grace will take over and cover with forgiving love a failure to keep his divine law."

It is frightening to think about a doctrinal concept, in regard to any matter, that sees a situation as being such that the Gospel has no remedy for it and grace cannot forgive it upon repentance. It is even more frightening to realize that such an idea could become accepted by such large numbers of our own brethren. But this is exactly where the traditional view of divorce and remarriage ends up, setting aside the whole idea of atonement and substituting in its place restitution.

Brethren, if we stop to think at all, surely we will know that if we throw out the concept of atonement and grace we may as well throw away the rest of the Bible too, for that is the very heart of it.

Certainly it is true that we must not abuse grace by continuing to practice sin. (Rom. 6:1-2). But when people stop committing the sin of putting away mates and marrying others, and turn to the way of God, one man for one woman for life, they are not continuing to repeat the sin. We greatly err when we presume to place upon them the further requirement of restitution. That is a requirement of which the apostles would say, "We gave no such commandment!"

The real questions at issue here are clear enough that anyone who wants to know what pleases God can look up the Bible answers.

### **THESE ARE THE QUESTIONS AT ISSUE:**

1. In Mat. 19:9 is the sin in marriage breaking or in marriage practice?
2. Is the "adultery" committed against the first wife in divorcing her and marrying another, or is it committed with the second wife in the marriage relationship which follows?
3. Does God see unscriptural putting away as not actual, so that a man is still married to a wife after he has divorced her?
4. Does God see a man as not really married to the second wife if he has been divorced in the past?
5. Is permanent celibacy really a viable option for people who cannot contain?
6. Is marriage given for all mankind or is it a special privilege reserved only for those who have never abused it?

It seems to me that the scriptures are explicit on these questions and very clear. I would urge that we all study them out from the standpoint of textual statement, not what men have traditionally thought about them. It is also my firm conviction that when the scriptures are fully and adequately consulted on any given matter, there is no such thing as a sin problem to which grace has no application and the Gospel has no remedy. I believe Jesus who said, "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world, through Him, might be saved." (John 3: 17).



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Brother Baird points out that God intends marriage to be permanent. Is this an issue in the present controversy?
2. Is it consistent to say that unscriptural divorce can be forgiven without being undone but the following marriage cannot be?
3. What about the argument that "God will enable one to live a celibate life." Has God made us that promise?
4. At the creation, why was it "not good that the man should be alone"? What did God do to remedy that?
5. In how many situations is sexual activity for humans approved in the Bible?
6. How vital is marriage in God's plan for moral purity on earth?
7. What is the chief reason Satan is opposed to marriage?
8. What assignment was given the apostles as concerns helping us understand the teaching of Jesus?
9. In the case where we find that the apostles understood Jesus on a certain point in a different way than we do, what is indicated? What should we do in that case?
10. If we presume to teach and advise our fellow travelers, what responsibility does this place upon us?
11. Does grace and mercy have an application to the sins discussed in our subject here?

# 10. Repentance, Reformation, and Cleansing

Do we differ on the question of what constitutes genuine repentance? Our opposition has represented that we do. If indeed we differ, and it may be that we do in some ways, it is not in the way they usually represent it to be. Typical of what they say about it is this statement:



**REPENTANCE INVOLVES MORE THAN MERELY SAYING  
"I'M SORRY!"**

GARLAND ELKINS -- SPIRITUAL SWORD -- OCTOBER, 1987 - PG. 20

This reflects a total misconception of what our difference is. The statement above is absolutely true and we have never suggested otherwise. In both of the 1977 debates they kept saying we were contending for an idea of repentance in which a guilty person would

merely say, "I am sorry" and continue the practice of sin, supposedly repented of. We kept denying it and stated repeatedly that our position recognizes that the sin must be stopped. But the misunderstanding continued and it was later represented that way all over the land. To this day many think that about us, who have judged us by what our opponents said instead of what we have actually said.

The reason they charge that we do not teach real repentance is that they **assume** a major point at issue. What we deny is not that repentance demands the cessation of the sin. What we deny is that repentance demands the cessation of marriage. We deny that the marriage relationship is what constitutes the sin. Our issue is not "May the sin continue?" Our issue is "What is the sin of adultery?" According to the text the sin of adultery is committed when a man does two things, **1. Puts away his wife without cause** and **2. Marries another**. They dispute that and assume that the sin of adultery occurs in the course of the subsequent marriage relationship and thus it continues in practice. To accuse us of contending that "The sin may continue," one has to assume that the sin is in the subsequent marriage relationship instead of where Jesus said it is. The difference then is not in the **meaning of repentance**, but in **identifying the sin**.

The Greek word "metanoeo," translated "repentance," means a change of the mind that results in a change of behavior. This is not questioned among us as far as I know. But we do seem to have a difference on the question of its relationship to restitution.

It is generally agreed also that there are situations in which a refusal to restore something would indicate a lack of genuine repentance. For instance, if a man steals another man's car and later repents, he will return the car to its rightful owner. If one should steal a thousand dollars from a store and later repent of it, he would not go out and spend that money and refuse to return it. Why is this the case? Because the car still belongs to the man from whom it was

stolen. The money still belongs to the store owner. Of course it is to be returned. But is every case of wrong doing always of this nature?

What if the man who took the car produces a bill of sale or a title, signed over by the other man, and proves that he purchased it? That is a totally different picture, isn't it?. What if the man who has the thousand dollars produces signed documents showing that the store gave it to him for some reason and so it was his? This is the case of a divorced person. He or she has a signed "bill of divorcement." There is no legal way that the previous mate can still claim "ownership."

What we challenge is not that repentance requires the sin to be stopped, but rather that it has an inflexible requirement of restitution attached. That is not repentance, it is penance. In debate our opponents admitted there are some sins in which restitution is not possible, such as murder, and that in such cases the sin can be forgiven without it. But they insisted that if it is humanly possible, restitution is essential to repentance.

This does not square with the lexical definition of the word nor with the way it is used in the Bible. This idea that confuses repentance with penance and may be a more serious error than many of us realize.

## THE WORD DEFINED

“The change of mind of those who have begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds, and have determined to enter upon a better course of life, so that it embraces both a recognition of sin and sorrow for it and hearty amendment, the tokens and effects of which are good deeds.”

- Thayers' Lexicon, pg. 406

The definition does not say, "The tokens and effects of which are restitution." **Good deeds** are the evidence of repentance. This is born out in John's explanation given in Luke 3. He said at verse 8, "Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance." The people asked at verse 10 what he meant and he replied, "Let him that hath two coats impart to him that hath none. And he that hath meat let him do likewise." Nothing is said about restitution of anything from the past. When the Publicans asked what this meant to them, he said, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you." Nothing about restitution. At verse 14 the soldiers asked what it meant to them and John said, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages." Still nothing about restitution. So when John was asked about the "fruits of repentance" he defined it as good things that were to begin now. The definition Thayer gives and the explanation of John the Baptist, are totally forward looking, not backward looking at all.

Brethren who quote John's words and Thayer's definition and attribute to them a concept of restitution as a part of the meaning of repentance, are seeing their own unfounded theory, not what is actually there. No scriptures anywhere teach that.

## THE "STOLEN CAR" ARGUMENT

The difference between a stolen car and a second mate is that one was released, or signed over, by its owner and the other was not. The car must be returned because it still belongs to the one from whom it was stolen. For this illustration to have any meaning the same would have to be true of the person divorced, they still belong to the previous mate. That is not true.

In this argument we see clearly that the traditional concept does indeed depend on the assumptions of the sacrament theory. There is no basis on which to say "The merchandise has to be returned to its rightful owner," if the so called "rightful owner" does not still own it, and in this case he doesn't.

Whether the divorce was right or wrong, fair or unfair, the fact of the divorce, the written release, does mark the end of the first mate's "claim to ownership." I have known cases where some elders had declared that a certain member was "living in adultery" because she had been divorced and remarried. They disfellowshipped her and sent out letters announcing the charge to other churches. The member instigated a lawsuit against the elders for "slander" because they had told it abroad that she was living in adultery when in fact she was living in a marriage. In the course of things they saw that she could prove her case because she had signed papers releasing her from the first marriage and signed papers authorizing her second marriage. Wisely they apologized and she dropped the suit.

When faced with a showdown in court these elders wisely backed off because the facts were on her side. They knew that the court would not recognize their basic assumption, that the first marriage was still intact and the second marriage was not actual. To me it appears that in the day of judgment when these charges come before the court of heaven and the same assumption is challenged, they will be just as completely without proof of it as they are now. It rests on human assumption and neither God nor civil law recognizes that.

## **THE RESTITUTION CONCEPT**

In 1983 the Gospel Advocate Adult Lesson Quarterly included a lesson entitled "Laws Regarding Restitution." On page 23 the writer, Robert Taylor Jr., said this: "The person guilty of theft should cease the dishonest habit immediately. He should genuinely repent. Is he allowed then to keep his ill-gotten gains? Many feel that he can and should. They think 'I am sorry' removes all obligation. Not so! Repentance results in an amended life and this calls for restitution inasmuch as is humanly possible."

Here we see again that they think those of us who reject the inflexible requirement of restitution are saying that to merely say, "I

am sorry" fixes everything and the sinful practice may continue. This is not what is being said at all.

The real error in the concept set forth in that quarterly lesson is made very clear in the last words of the lesson text. At the bottom of page 25 this incredible statement occurs: "We overcome the evils of the past by making restitution, today, tomorrow, and even into the future for the evils already committed."

*Note: The reader should note that this was written back in 1983. I feel sure it does not reflect the views of the present editorship.*

This lesson quarterly was studied in church of Christ auditoriums all across the country in 1983, including this very disturbing error. That may partly account for the fact that many members of the church hold the concept of restitution as a part of the meaning of repentance.

It is right to view repentance as a complete change of attitude so that one will do whatever he can to reverse the effects of his sin in the lives of all involved parties. But to cast aside the Biblical concept of atonement for sin and replace it with the idea that we overcome the evils of the past by making restitution, is in fact, to cast away virtually the entire New Testament, for that is the very heart and soul of its message. Restitution of physical things is sometimes right and in the best interests of all concerned. But it is just as true that sometimes restitution of physical things is not in anybody's best interest. In any case, the only atonement provided is the cross. The only thing in the universe that can reach into the past and erase sins is the blood of Jesus Christ. Restitution cannot be seen as something in any way similar to that.

## **HOW GOD USES THE WORD**

In becoming a Christian the sinner is required to "repent," among other things. (Acts 2:38). Repentance and baptism are said to be "for

the remission of sins." The word "remission" is from the Greek word "aphesin," which means free pardon, the cancelling of a debt the person does not pay. Salvation is pictured throughout the New Testament as a free gift of God, obtained without payment by sinners of their own sin debt. (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 6:23 etc.) Now, if repentance is required but the repayment of our sin debt is not required, then obviously repentance and paying back our sin debt are not the same thing.

Stopping the sinful practice is indeed a part of what repentance means, As Paul expressed it, "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:2). This is another way of saying, "How shall we continue to commit the sin if we have repented of it?" But that is far different from saying, "How shall we be forgiven of sins if we have not paid it all back?"

## DAVID AND BATHSHEBA

One of the most flagrantly sinful episodes in the Old Testament involves a marriage being brought into existence by way of adultery and murder. In 2 Samuel chapter 11 we read that David was attracted to Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. He sent messengers to bring her to him and he committed adultery with her, after which she was pregnant. David then ordered Joab to have Uriah placed in the most dangerous battle spot and he was killed. David then took Bathsheba for his wife and she bore him a son. The last verse of the chapter, after saying this, says, **"But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."**

I don't know that we could imagine a more wicked scenario than this as a way to get a wife (or husband) that one desires but has no right to. In the next chapter God sent Nathan to David to talk to him and apparently to get him to understand how evil was this thing he had done. As Nathan illustrated it with a parable David did understand and he said, "I have sinned against the Lord!" But Nathan said what traditionalists are unable to say to penitent violators of marriage



today, "**The Lord also hath put away thy sin. Thou shalt not die.**" (12:13)

Significantly, as the account continues, although David was given some forms of punishment for those deeds, **he kept the wife** and evidently with God's approval! Certainly, God condemned the way this marriage came into existence. "The thing David had done displeased the Lord" (11:27). But the subsequent marriage relationship which followed those sins was not condemned. God blessed that relationship and Solomon was born of it. It was through this lineage that Jesus later was born into the world. If a marriage which is brought into existence by such sinful acts is not actually a marriage in God's sight, then we have serious defects in the messianic line itself and God was a party to it!

In my debate with Jim Waldron in 1977 I presented this case as an argument that God does not see repentance as requiring that a marriage be destroyed because it was produced by sinful actions. His reply was that the reason David was allowed to keep this wife was the fact that Uriah was now dead. To this I responded that what that line of argument does is to make **murder** preferable to **divorce**. Thus, if one wants to get out of a marriage and form another he may do that if he has his wife killed, but not if he divorces her! Would repentance be more genuine in the case of one who kills his wife and then stays in a second marriage than it would in the case of one who divorces his wife and then stays in a second marriage?

Bear in mind that we are not talking about either course of action being right. We are talking about it being forgivable and about what constitutes repentance in the case. Most Bible scholars believe that David wrote Psalm 51 as an expression of his deep sorrow for this sin and heartfelt repentance of it. But clearly there was no thought in the mind of God, Nathan, or David that to destroy another marriage and have one or both parties finish their lives in celibacy would be the way to fix those sins.

It is good to be concerned about genuineness in repentance. Faith also must be genuine and heartfelt, and so must baptism and the new life in Christ be with all our heart. But men tend to err in judgment when they go too far in issuing final judgments as to **how** this genuineness must be expressed. As Christians we must recognize flagrant sins and oppose them (1 Cor. 5:2-7). But that is not the same thing as making a ruling for God that "He sees the first marriage as still intact," contrary to the text of Mat. 19:9, and on that basis to declare a person "ineligible to ever practice marriage again," and to declare that a certain marriage is "an adulterous relationship." Let our evaluations of these things be geared to the Bible text, not human theory.

When the sin of **vow breaking** is repudiated and the person now practices **vow keeping**, he has repented in the Biblical sense of the word. The result of that repentance is a changed attitude toward his marriage obligations. The idea that he must also repent of marriage itself is the **penance** idea of tradition, not the **repentance** idea as taught in the Bible.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Is it true that "repentance" involves more than merely saying the words, "I am sorry"?
2. What is assumed by those who charge that we do not teach real repentance?
3. Is it true that in some cases restitution is a mark of genuine repentance? Is it true in all cases?
4. How does "penance" differ from "repentance"?
5. What is the difference between a stolen car and a wife who married after divorce?
6. Does the Bible teach that "We overcome the evils of the past by making restitution, today, tomorrow, and even into the future, for the evils already committed"?
7. When John the Baptist explained what he meant by "fruits worthy of repentance," did he include restitution?
8. How does God use the word "repentance" in the Bible?
9. In the case of David and Bathsheba, did repentance mean giving back the wife wrongfully taken?
10. What will repentance mean in the case of a man who has been guilty of the sin of vow breaking?

# 11.

## Correcting Sin the Bible Way

Perhaps the most glaring and damaging error in the traditional position is that in essence it omits grace from the process of correcting the sin. Thus, it would be good to refresh our minds at this point on the Bible way to remedy sin, although it is a subject we have all felt that we fully understood for years.

God spelled out the way grace is applied when he announced His intention to do things that way. In Isaiah 55:7 He said, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Knowing that men would likely misunderstand because this isn't a human way, He added, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways, says the Lord."

Note, the wicked is to forsake his way and return to the Lord and to His way. When he does God will have mercy and will pardon. In Hebrews 8:12 it is stated this way: "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." The way this applies to the sin of marriage breaking is illustrated in the chart below.

GOD'S IDEAL	MAN'S PRACTICE
One man, One woman, Committed for Life	Putting away wives to marry others. Going from mate to mate.

**If the wicked forsakes his way, what will he stop doing? If he returns to God's way, what will he start doing?**

When sin occurs it means that man's mind is on a different wavelength than God's on the matter in view. If a man is leading a life of dishonesty he is rejecting God's ideal, that we be honest, kind generous etc. There is a reteaching to be done, a mind changing job. If the man can be taught and persuaded to change his mind to match God's mind on the matter, and change his behavior to match God's ideal, this is repentance. God's word is that when this is done, the wicked man forsakes his way and adjusts to God's way, his sins will be pardoned, remembered no more. It is man who raises the question, "How shall we make satisfaction for those past sins?" not God.

In the case of a man who breaks marriage vows repeatedly, puts away a wife to get another and keeps repeating that, his mind is also on a different wavelength than God's mind on that matter. The mind of God on it is one man for one woman in a life long commitment in marriage. A reteaching is to be done, a mind changing job. If the man can be convinced of the wrongness of his way and changes his mind so that it results in a change in his behavior, he adjusts to God's way,

he has repented. He stops going from mate to mate and starts honoring his marriage vows. But he can only begin now. He cannot go back and begin 5 years ago nor even one year ago. This is why there had to be a cross in the Gospel plan. Man cannot fix his own sins.

## **IS IT ATONEMENT OR IS IT RESTITUTION?**

It seems strange that this question should even arise among us since the Bible is so abundantly clear on it. But there is a need today to understand the difference between these two ideas.

If a penitent sinner has something of value in his possession that belongs to someone else, do we not tell him to return it to its rightful owner? Of course we do. But when he has done that, do we then say to him, "Now your sin debt to God is paid!?" Certainly not. We commend him for doing the right thing in giving back the item but at the same time we know it did not atone for the sin of taking it in the first place. We also know there were other dishonest "deals" in his past that he has no way to restore. This might include getting some things that were within the bounds of the law so they do not still belong to someone else. But he knows the deal itself was not really honest.

Is it not a fact that usually we do not even inquire into such matters at all? Haven't we always known that when a sinner repents and turns to the Lord the cleansing blood of Jesus cancels his past? For the alien sinner coming to Christ the procedure is "Repent and be baptized... in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." For the erring Christian coming back the procedure is, "Repent of this thy wickedness and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee." But as concerns the sin of divorce has human rationalizing been allowed to change this in our minds? Is it restitution in that case?

What if the habitual divorcee decides to take the restitution route and attempts to fix things up that way? He divorces his present wife and goes back to the original home, and gets his former wife, now married to another man, to divorce him, or perhaps have him killed, and they put the original marriage back together. Have they rectified their sin and made things right with God? No. The truth is they have compounded their sin. Now they have broken two more marriages, along with a lot of other associated hurts and mistreatment of people involved such as children and relatives. Two wrongs do not make a right and neither does five or six more wrongs.

Penance is not effective in remedying sin either. If a man decides to live alone for the rest of his days, it will not change the sinfulness of what he did in the past at all and it cannot possibly atone for it. Such a course fixes nothing. It merely warps the life of a person and places upon him what is contrary to nature as God made us, something that God Himself said is not a workable thing for most people.

Such is the way it usually goes when men legislate for God. The man made laws of restitution and/or penance are opposed to the way of God and are very damaging to lives and souls. By contrast the way of God is redemptive and brings healing and recovery from sin problems. It is a very simple thing as the Bible gives it. Sinning people are to forsake their way and come to God's way. When they do their behavior is changed to match God's stated will. He does indeed receive them with mercy and forgiveness so that in Christ each one is "a new creature" and "old things are passed away." (2 Cor. 5:17).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. What is the first, most basic thing, we need to do for any sinner?
2. If a sinner learns the difference between his way and God's way and changes to God's way, what does the Bible call that?
3. What sort of restitution might be required of a criminal who repents after 10 years of dishonest dealing?
4. When a sinner learns better and repents, i.e. enters upon a better course of life, what does he need additionally?
5. For one who has repeatedly violated God's marriage laws for 10 years, what should we do first?
6. If a sinful divorcee learns better and repents, i.e. enters upon a better course of life, is there a difference between what he needs next and what the criminal needed?
7. If a man repents of doing dishonest business but continues to do business honestly, is he continuing to repeat the sin? Is he required never to do business again?
8. In a case where a couple divorces unscripturally and both marry others, is it right to break two more marriages in the name of repentance?
9. What is the only thing in the universe that can blot out sins of the past?



# 12. God's Divorce and the Remarriage of His Ex-wife

One of the surest proofs that the theories which forbid marriage to divorced persons are wrong, is the example of God Himself. The Jews in the first century were invited to "marry" Christ, in a spiritual sense. But for them it was a second marriage. They were the put away "guilty party." The Old Testament tells us that God was "married" to Israel. (Jer. 3:14). It also tells us at verse 8 that God saw the many adulteries of Israel and finally "put her away and wrote her a bill of divorcement." Yes, God said He divorced His wife. So it is not true that divorce only happens to people who are just not good people to start with, low caliber and unstable. It has happened also to some very Godly, spiritual minded people. This can happen because in marriage you have a two party situation and one cannot

necessarily control what the other one does. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in God's own case and His spiritual "marriage" relationship with Israel.

The situation was not repaired during the duration of Old Testament times. God said later in Jeremiah that a new covenant would come to be made which was "not according to the covenant I made with their fathers..." (Jer. 31:31-32). It would be a reconciliation all right, not as husband and wife but rather as father to children. In The Old Testament God was the husband to His people. In the New Testament God is the Father to His people and His Son, Jesus, is the husband. Like it or not, this is what the Bible expressly says. This is, in fact, the very situation that had to be explained to the Jews at Rome, "them that know the law," as Romans 7:1 puts it.

Ironically, brethren have been reading the early part of Romans 7 as confirming their contention that marriage is indissoluble, so that a couple is still married "in God's sight" after divorce. Actually these verses say the exact opposite. It is true that the first 3 verses say that the law bound a woman to her husband as long as he was alive, and that if she were joined to another man while her husband lived, by that law she would be called an adulteress. If you stop there that is all you have, and this is what brethren have done. But if you read on, verse 4 says, "You also have become dead to the law, by the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, even to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit unto God."

The word for "another" in this verse is "heteros." It means another of a different kind. So here is God's former wife, Israel, divorced for adultery, now being given as a bride to another by God Himself. Human theory would see this as a wife being "double married." But Paul stated otherwise. He said, "I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." (2 Cor. 11:2).

Yes, Paul did say that the law would not allow a woman to be joined to another man while her husband lived. But he said they were "dead to the law" and it was "by the body of Christ" that it was so. If you

remove the "body of Christ" from the picture so they are not dead to the law, take away the forgiveness factor, you end up where traditional brethren do. That is precisely why they end up there. They do remove the cross from the picture where this sin is concerned. Somehow they seem to feel that to recognize it as pardonable, is to take away the stigma and condone the sin. That is not true.

If traditionalists are right and a divorced adulteress cannot marry again, then the Jews cannot marry Christ. I know it is a marriage in a spiritual sense, but the principles could not be different. It is still a marriage. Two parties made an agreement, or vows, to each other and one was persistently unfaithful to those vows, and the husband put her away and wrote her a bill of divorcement. Would anyone say that "spiritual adultery" is any more right than adultery of a physical kind?

The fact is that God is not the author of the theories of tradition and in His own divorce situation, He totally ignored them. By their theories God Himself and Jesus Christ both stand in perpetual violation of the decrees they are trying to bind upon God's people, as well as every Jew who obeys the Gospel. How much more certain could we be that a theory is wrong?

## **THE DIVINE REMEDY IN THE FIRST CENTURY**

Romans 7:1-4 is not a passage stating God's law concerning divorce and remarriage among humans. It is an explanation of the principle involved in the permission God gave for the Israelites to come out from under the Old Testament law and accept the New Testament Gospel of Christ. That is precisely the same principle that was involved in Paul's giving permission for all people to practice marriage, including those who have sinned against it in the past.

The principle we refer to is the effect resulting from the sacrifice Jesus made at the cross, referred to in the expression, "by the body

of Christ." It is the efficacy of that atoning sacrifice to blot out past violations and to give people new beginnings for their lives. Not only did Paul apply this to the Romans, he also applied it to the Corinthians and to all others whom he addressed on the subject of redemption. In 1 Cor. 6:9-11 he listed a number of practices that would prevent one's being in the kingdom of God. The third one on the list is "adulterers." Then at verse 11 he said, "And such were some of you, but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." (New KJV)

Then he began the next chapter (7) by saying that every person there was to be allowed to practice marriage. "Nevertheless to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife and let every woman have her own husband." (Vs. 2). Here again is illustrated the fact that the cross did indeed purchase forgiveness and a new beginning even for those who sin against marriage. Paul knew that this kind of sin had been done by some at Corinth, as he said. He also knew that a case of marriage violation was going on there right then. (Chapter 5: 1). But when such sins were repented of and ceased, the blood of Jesus would cleanse them completely and their rights to practice marriage were not affected. In later centuries when men concluded that violations against marriage bring about the result that the people are "ineligible to practice marriage," they imposed a regulation that is unknown to scripture and which serves to set aside the atoning blood of Jesus in favor of human "restitution."

Yes, God does know what it is like to have a love relationship go bad and how trying it can be to try to save it. Call it "spiritual" or "figurative" or whatever you like, but the fact is God knows what it is like to keep pleading with a disloyal spouse and to make repeated efforts at reconciliation. Many times He forgave Israel and took her back, only to have her betray Him again. Finally there was nothing left to do but divorce her and this is what God did. He knows how that feels. It may be that too many of us are weak in our knowledge of the Old Testament and that's why we have not understood this.

But God is also a God of incredible love and compassion. He provided the remedy Himself for that situation, the sacrifice of His own Son on the cross. The fact that even a sin this ugly can be pardoned and a new beginning obtained, does not mean that the sin is not really bad. The mistake traditionalists make is in not applying this remedy the way the Bible does. They do stipulate the wrongness involved, as Paul does in the first 3 verses of Romans 7. But they misapply those words of Paul to the Gospel, not to the law as Paul did. They stop after verse 3 and apply the passage as a prohibition of marriage rights, backwards to what Paul said at verse 4 that his point was, the **granting of marriage rights**.

Where the law stopped the woman was without recourse in a marriage and without remedy if she left it. The theory that stops there makes that the situation of all people today. But going ahead and completing the picture, as Paul did at verse 4, we include the fact that God has provided such an efficacious remedy that even a wife who has been persistently unfaithful and was divorced for that unfaithful-ness, can see herself as "dead to the law by the body of Christ, that you may be married to another." If we stop where the law stops we wind up where the woman Paul spoke of would have wound up if there had been no sacrifice on the cross and verse 4 had not been written, a convicted violator with no remedy for her situation.

This is the tragic mistake of the traditional delusion. It ends up nullifying God's provision for remedy, the sacrifice of Christ. This is an extremely serious mistake with extremely far-reaching consequences.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Does the Bible say that God has had a divorce?
2. Was God justified in divorcing Israel?
3. Did God divorce Israel for adultery?
4. Did God approve a subsequent marriage for Israel?
5. Why did the Jews at Rome have trouble understanding their right to spiritually "marry another"?
6. Is Paul's purpose in Rom. 7:1-4 to show that a divorced woman cannot marry another, or that she can?
7. Does Romans 7:2-3 say that a man or woman remain married in the eyes of God after they divorce?
8. In Romans 7:20-3 was Paul talking about situation under the law or under the Gospel?
9. What is the basis on which Paul said the Jews at Rome could be seen as "dead to the law"?
10. Did Paul see the Corinthians as having been released from their sins in a different way from the Romans?
11. The Jews had been guilty of adultery in spiritual ways. The Corinthians had committed it in physical ways. Was the remedy different for one than for the other?
12. Does God know first hand how it feels to go through the ordeal of a divorce situation?
13. What is the basic mistake in the traditional misuse of Romans 7?

# 13.

## **Much More at Stake Than Any One Issue**

As I see it the divorce-remarriage controversy is only a symptom of deeper problems in fundamentals of Bible truth. There is more at stake here than any one issue. Too many Christians are losing their hold on very basic elements of the Christian faith. These are mistakes that can lead to errors on many things, perhaps even more serious than the matter of divorce and remarriage. Therefore we need to give serious thought to the foundations on which we stand and how they are being affected by the subject at hand.

## VITAL TRUTHS AT STAKE

1. Atonement Vs. Restitution
2. Grace Vs. Penance
3. God's word Vs. Human Theory

We have already mentioned the tendency of the traditional view to push atonement out of the picture and replace it with restitution. But the whole message of the Bible rests on the concept of atonement. If this can be thrown out on one subject, why not on others? What kind of a "Gospel" would we have left?

Neither can we throw out grace and have any semblance of the Gospel message left. But that seems on the verge of happening. If grace can be denied to those guilty of this sin, how many other sins will ultimately be excluded from its application? The efforts to defend the traditional position on divorce and remarriage appears to be capable of including almost any premise, no matter how unbiblical, premises that have never been acceptable on any other subject. Can we afford to let this happen?

As concerns human theory, if it can overrule scripture on this subject, it can do so on other subjects and we are in a lot of trouble. That is what is happening. What if someone said to you, "I have a theory I want you to accept as absolute law. It has no precedent in Bible example. No apostle or inspired person ever stated it. I offer you one scripture verse as proof, but my theory contradicts every statement in that verse. But I want you to accept this theory as a law of God and as being so absolute that you must withdraw fellowship from any who refuse to believe it." What would you say to this proposition?

This is exactly what is being promoted in the traditional concept. Is there a Bible precedent, a case where someone was pronounced "ineligible to have a marriage"? Did any inspired person ever say



that baptism had to be refused and fellowship denied to someone because of a divorce and a remarriage? Does not the traditional theory contradict every statement made in Mat. 19:9? If it is accepted will it not be on the basis of human theory over ruling Bible statement?

These are serious errors in fundamentals and that is cause for alarm. No apostasy is ever intentional. But that does not keep it from being a disastrous course to take. No Biblical doctrine is safe from perversion if this kind of procedure is acceptable. Any command of God might be over ruled where men reason that way. If atonement is replaced with restitution, grace is replaced with penance, and human theory carries more weight than Bible statements, we are in real trouble. For a long time I was not sure the traditional element had actually gone that far from a Biblical stance. But after two decades of meeting their arguments, I now know they have.

The matter of handling aright the word of truth is a key principle in all our walk with God. I think it appropriate therefore to conclude this work the way we began it, with an appeal for the acceptance of the word of God, exactly as He has given it, as the only authority standard. It is possible for any of us to be mistaken, including me. But that must be determined by the divine standard, not by the rulings of human councils, whether they speak from Rome or from Memphis, Tennessee. May God help us to lean entirely on His word for direction that we may be faithful, not only in marriage matters but in all other matters as well, and that we may continue to be people of God.

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

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1. Is the concept of atonement a very important doctrine of the New Testament?
2. How is the blood of Jesus our "atoning sacrifice"?
3. Is it necessary to be saved by grace or can penance bring the same result?
4. What is meant by the doctrine of "doing penance"?
5. Do you think there is any likelihood anyone will let the word of God be overruled by human theories in their mind?
6. What consequences might possibly follow if people allow human theories to overrule scripture statements?
7. Would you accept as a law of God a statute that has no precedent in scripture example, no statement in scripture to confirm it, and which denies every statement made in the one passage offered as proof of it?
8. Are any of us infallible, not subject to mistake?
9. How should it be determined whether or not one is mistaken?
10. Continuing in the word of the Lord is essential to what? (John 8:31-32).

## **BibleTalk.tv is an Internet Mission Work.**

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The goal of this mission work is to spread the gospel to the greatest number of people using the latest technology available. For the first time in history, it is becoming possible to preach the gospel to the entire world at once. BibleTalk.tv is an effort to preach the gospel to all nations every day until Jesus returns.

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