

# DIVORCE, REPENTANCE

AND THE GOSPEL OF GRACE

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It is not God's will that marriages crash and burn, but they do. God's will is violated when this happens. Looking at divorce God sees sin, yes. But He also sees much more. He sees hurting, broken people struggling for answers and souls in need of repair. What must be done next? What must the two parties do? What must the church do? What must concerned bystanders do?

In this first book we put the picture into perspective with its historic background to see how and why it came to be that people fail to find Bible solutions to these problems.

We look at questions now being discussed and disputed, and we consider how the grace of God applies to this sin according to the Bible. Here are the chapter titles:

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# INTRODUCTION

During the time of the apostles, as far as the inspired record states, there was no uproar about divorce and remarriage. Today there is a great uproar. Why?

Tracing the activities of the apostles and early Christians through the book of Acts and the epistles we find sins against marriage were recognized as sin but we find no instance of that being singled out for special attention or handled differently than other sins. This is not to suggest that they did not regard it as sin nor that they had no concern for the permanence of marriage.

But are there such great procedural differences between the way it was handled then and the way it is handled now that can suggest reasons why there is a brotherhood furor now where there was none then?

R.L. Whiteside raised this question a generation ago, although he did not offer a complete answer, back when it was just starting to generate a storm in the church. He wrote, "But it seems to me that we say a lot more about this matter of divorce and marrying again than did the apostles. Read their letters and also study their preaching, and see how little they said about the matter; and yet the marriage vows were then treated more lightly, if possible, than they are now. What is the explanation? Were they more lenient toward the ignorant and the erring than you and I are? Did they baptize those who demanded baptism without looking into what they had formerly done? Would they have said what I have said about divorce and marriage among aliens? The apostles were the ambassadors of Christ – the last interpreters of His will. Perhaps we should study from this angle more than we have yet done so." (Reflections, pg. 412).

This is precisely the objective of this book, to look into these questions. Perhaps the first thing we should realize is that between the apostolic age and now a lot of things changed, influenced by human theory and judgment. After the apostles left the earthly scene, almost immediately influences began to filter into the church from other sources. The apostles had predicted departures from the faith to come later. Paul told the Ephesian elders, "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them." (Acts 20:30).

Having been reared in the strictest principles of conservatism in the church of Christ, although I have learned to temper these against extremes, I have not laid aside the concept of strict accuracy to the Bible text. I regard being a slave to the text as tantamount to being a slave to the Lord, and as the best safeguard we have against human error. Naturally then, my question would be, What changes came about since apostolic times that make our situation so different? What lies between the first century church and the 20th century church that changed peace into turbulence? Are the tenets of what is believed now different? Is it that the basic procedures are

different, i.e. how we promote and execute those beliefs? It may be some of both. But we need to learn about the changes and the reasons behind them.

I want it known that I appreciate every person who is determined to do the right thing, on both sides of this question. It is not my intention to question the motives of those who hold the position I oppose. I do not see them as less sincere than I. I appreciate every one who is open minded enough to read and consider the material offered here. We must resist the influence of traditionalism upon our faith, including the matter of handling divorce and remarriage cases. My reasons for this conviction comprise most of the content of this book. I invite every reader to look at these reasons and evidences and examine them for himself. Let's retrace the steps of history toward apostolic times. Let's go back and examine the changes that have taken place. May God grant us all the disposition of heart and mind to receive with meekness all that agrees with His word, and to reject anything that deviates from it in any direction. Let every man's position stand or fall upon this criterion. Let the contents of this book be measured by that standard only.

"Lord, when we are wrong, make us willing to change.  
And when we are right, make us easy to live with."

**- Peter Marshall**

# 1. History of the Controversy in Medieval Tradition

At the time Jesus was on earth the Jews were discussing questions about God's will concerning divorce, and had been for some time, as evidenced by the question they asked the Lord in Matthew 19:3. Apparently the apostles had no problem with the matter at all after the coming of the Holy Spirit to guide them, from Pentecost day forward. As far as the New Testament indicates, they challenged no one's "marriage eligibility" and never ordered anyone to finish their lives in celibacy. Regardless of what interpretation one may put upon that silence, we need to recognize that the silence itself is a fact and start from there. It is a fact of history that the concept of "the church's jurisdiction over matrimonial causes" developed at a much later time.

If the church during the time of the apostles was without disputes concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage, the church immediately after their time was a sharp contrast to that. In less than a hundred years we find disputes such as Marcion contending that the God of the Old Testament was different from the God of the New Testament because one permitted divorce and the other did not, and Tertullian arguing against that and saying that divorce is not entirely prohibited in the New Testament. (Against Marcion, iv, 34). Other disputes are on record dating back to these early centuries, over such things as whether sexual relations in marriage must be only for reproduction purposes, (Athenagoras, 2nd century), whether celibacy was superior to marriage, (Origen, Tertullian), whether or not a surviving mate could marry again after the death of a spouse, whether clergymen could marry at all, and what sort of penance had to be required of people coming into the church who had already divorced and remarried, and a host of other questions.

In AD 325, at the Council of Nicaea, a motion was actually introduced to prohibit clergymen from cohabiting with their wives. At this time they were still allowed to have wives. The motion was defeated, mainly on the strength of the argument that marriage is honorable and that enforced abstinence might expose their wives to unchastity (Socrates, Eccl. History, i, 11).

So we see that out of a background of confusion men grappled with a variety of questions relating to marriage through many centuries. Right now we need to realize that these disputes did occur and that some of the concepts reflected a pagan influence. Also we need to realize that out of these times there grew up certain rulings that the apostles had not seen fit to give and a concept of divorce - remarriage law that, if the apostles held it, they did not say so. Most observers of history agree that the early "church fathers" were influenced by their environment, both paganism and Judaism. Pat Harrell observed, "Christianity did not begin in a vacuum. Its roots were deep in the soil of Judaism; its branches reached out into the Gentile world. Although the church's task was to influence its



environment, it could not escape being influenced. Its attitude toward marriage and divorce was influenced by Jewish and Roman backgrounds." (Divorce & Remarriage in the Early Church, pg. 89).

History also seems to indicate that the most significant steps of change were taken in the first three centuries after the apostles, certainly within four centuries. Many fundamental ideas did not become official yet but they were planted and sprouting back in these times. Almost every law that was enacted later as a church legislation can be found occurring in the writings of the men who led the way back in these early centuries.

One of the ways in which paganism often exerted an influence was by means of competition. Christians were anxious to outstrip the pagans in setting high standards. For example, Tertullian declared that "A divorced woman is not able even to marry legitimately, and if she attempts some sort of union which is not marriage, will she not be guilty of the charge of adultery, seeing that adultery is an offense against marriage?" Later this concept blossomed into the very foundation on which the traditional viewpoint rests, the idea that a person is "not able" to contract a marriage after divorce and if they attempt to do so, it will not be a marriage. At least some of the credit for the origin of this idea must go to the competition with Roman paganism. A few sentences later Tertullian wrote, "They (the Romans) committed adultery, however, although they did not divorce; we, on the contrary, do not even permit remarriage, though we do allow divorce." (Monogamy, ix). Exceeding the righteousness of the pagans seemed to be important to several early Christian leaders.

During these years there seemed to be a tendency to lose sight of the fact that man is totally dependent on the Bible text to know what the will of God is. Doctrines developed from many sources and were occasioned by many kinds of influence, ranging from the views of neighboring religions to outright conjecture on the part of some church leaders. In many cases the conclusions reached ignored plain

Bible statements and sometimes even contradicted them. For instance a view prevailed in the pre-Nicene church that a surviving mate must not marry again after the death of a spouse, the statements of Paul to the contrary notwithstanding. "Digamy," as it is called, was condemned in Roman society at the time and this no doubt influenced church leaders. It is called "a sin" by Justin Martyr and Athenagoras termed it "specious adultery."

Another doctrine that came to be generally accepted in the church was that a person could fall away and repent only one time after baptism. There also arose very early the "penance" concept of squaring sins with God. Marriage was depreciated and celibacy was exalted as a superior state. Dr. Harrell wrote, "At an early date there arose in the anti-Nicene church a tendency to depreciate marriage. Undoubtedly many sources contributed to this spirit. A platonic synthesis began to filter into the church." (Ibid, pg. 164).

In many ways the whole concept of what marriage is and what its purposes are came to be thoroughly confused and inverted from the Bible concept. This tendency to turn from the Bible as the complete standard of authority during these centuries was a costly mistake. Men began to speak quite freely for God and to declare that such and such is so "in the sight of God," though many times what they said was pure assumption. In AD 325 the Council of Nicaea formalized many of the dogmas growing out of this era, while some others were not formalized until later Councils. Thus there emerged a version of the church that was actually a compound entity, developed upon a number of elements of doctrine from several sources. Some paganism, some Judaism, and some New Testament doctrine were combined into a religio-political system, which set itself forth as the "universal church."

In following centuries there was not a time when these dogmas were not being challenged, by some one or some group. The need was to return to reliance on the scripture for guidance and that is the need now. Jesus authorized His apostles to be His final interpreters and

sent the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. But this was displaced by human interpretation and speculation. Each time these were challenged arguments ensued but usually the questions were not settled. Only by returning the Bible to its appointed place of absolute authority can men return to the spiritual security, unity, and accuracy the apostles had.

The question asked of Jesus by the Pharisees in Matthew 19:3 and answered in following verses, did not, as far as the record states, pose any problem for the apostles after the Holy Spirit came to guide them. But for succeeding generations it has become the focal point of intense disputing. Most of the changes that developed later stem from enlargements upon this section of scripture, Matthew 19:3-12. It was happening very early in history.

For example, Clement of Alexandria referred to it as "The law that said thou shalt not put away thy wife, except in case of fornication," and then stated that even a separation in such a case would constitute fornication. (Stromata, ii, 23). In this setting the statement of verse 6 "What therefore God has joined together let not man put asunder," became, "God has joined them together and man **cannot** put it asunder." Although marriage was not officially declared a "sacrament" until the Council of Trent in the mid 16th century, the seeds of that doctrine are found growing here in the second and third centuries. The "indissolubility of marriage" idea, included in the Council of Trent declaration, is present in quotations from Clement and Tertullian. Despite being challenged by many, these ideas came to be established as "orthodox Christian doctrine."

Many historians say that in this time period there was a loss of theological equilibrium which began to tip markedly in the direction of asceticism, which is a basic pagan idea that God is pleased by human suffering and gives rewards for it. Chambers Encyclopedia says, "Christian doctrine, gradually systematized for the western church in the canon law, was opposed to the individualistic spirit of the Roman law and to the patriarchal organization of Germanic

society. It proclaimed indissoluble monogamy as the one true form of marriage and set its face against divorce, though permitting separation for such marital offences as adultery and admitting the possibility of annulment. It asserted that marriage was a sacrament ordained by God and could in no wise be looked upon as a special class of contract... Gradually it arrived at the view that a religious ceremony was the only legal mode of union, though marriages by mutual declaration of consent, without religious rite, were held to be valid. More important than all these points of difference was the radically changed attitude toward marriage and the family, springing from the asceticism of the Christian fathers." (Vol. 9, pg. 110).

In the next paragraph the article says, "Though divorce was finally forbidden, developments in the rules of prohibited degrees of relationship and in the definition of a valid marriage provided wider opportunities for annulment and separation. Ascetic influence interpreted the Old Testament rules for forbidding the marriage of near kin to cover a much wider number of cases. The extent of these impediments to marriage, together with the secrecy possible when mutual promise alone created a valid union, accounts for much of the practical instability of the marriage tie in the later medieval period."

It was this instability that the Council of Trent cited as a reason why they needed "a more efficacious remedy," (Chapter 1) or tighter controls on who could marry and who could not. In the next paragraph the article says that the Council of Trent reasserted the full doctrine of sacramental marriage and that henceforth a religious ceremony was essential to a valid marriage. That Council, in fact, declared that "Whoever contracts a marriage otherwise than in the presence of the pastor and of two witnesses, does so invalidly."

Encyclopedia International briefly summarizes the developments of these centuries in these words: "After a long controversy the church ultimately affirmed the sacramental nature of marriage at the

Council of Trent, and held that the bonds of matrimony could be broken only by death. This interpretation remains the Catholic view today. The protestant reformers, Zwingli, Luther, Calvin, and Knox rejected the sacramental nature of marriage and permitted divorce for serious reasons such as desertion and adultery; although in principle, they too opposed marital dissolutions." (Vol. 6, page 52).

So we see that over a long period of time the church gradually came to look upon itself as the guardian of marriage rights and the final judge of what God accepts or rejects in each individual case.

Collier's Encyclopedia describes the finished product this way: "Elevated to the supernatural order, marriage is entrusted to the vigilance of the church in such matters as the conditions required for its validity, the establishment of impediments, and the judging of matrimonial cases involving the sacramental bond." (Vol. 15, page 447). Later the same article says that the full "canonical legislation" is so complex and aims at defending so many things that "its application to particular cases sometimes requires the technical competence of a canon lawyer."

The long trail from the simple concept of marriage in apostolic times to the very complex "sacramental" concept, spanned some 14 1/2 centuries. The net result was that marriage was reclassified. Instead of a social arrangement for enabling males and females to relate together in an upright way, it was put into the category of church business, as another "channel of grace," regulated by a human hierarchy. Gone is the Bible idea that God created marriage because it was essential to the purity of the creatures He created. (Mat. 19:4-5). Gone is the idea that celibacy is "not good." (Gen. 2:18). Gone is the apostolic idea that fornication is to be avoided by letting every man have his own wife and every woman her own husband. (1 Cor. 7:2). Gone also is the Bible idea that "It is better to marry than to burn." (1 Cor. 7:9).

In place of these inspired expressions of the will of God the conclusions of human theory and speculation came to stand Instead

of teaching that marriage vows ought not to be broken and that to do so is sin, the church began to say that marriage cannot be broken by human hands. Thus if a couple gets a divorce according to the law of the land, God still holds them married to each other, and if either marries another mate, in God's sight they are not married to that mate and thus are simply living in perpetual adultery.

Instead of leaving the procedures for getting married unlegislated, as the Bible does, the church began to specify procedural details and to say that a marriage is not valid without those details, such as the presence of a priest and two witnesses. Instead of saying that a man who puts away his wife, except for fornication, and marries another commits adultery, the church began to say that a person who does that begins "living in a state of adultery" and has no hope of pardon until he separates from that marriage. This is the sacramental concept of marriage, in which the church is actually a third party in the contract, obligated to represent God and guard His interests in the matter. In this concept the church is seen as the keeper of the keys of validity.

Although my brethren reject the word "sacrament," they buy the concept. That is the source of the problems on this subject among us today. It is the product of religious evolution, not of divine precept. The faithful Christian, whose obsession is to please God, needs to know what the differences are between this concept and that of the apostles. This can only be determined by comparing the precepts tradition is stating with the statements given by the apostles, as recorded in the New Testament.

We would do well to remember that the traditional concept of divorce-remarriage law came into existence long after men had departed from many New Testament fundamentals, especially grace and atonement, and that it grew out of human concepts of justice more than out of the Bible idea of divine mercy. It is not surprising then, that these are missing from its basic premises.

# 2. The Controversy Within the Restoration Movement

## PART 1

The reader may have noticed that throughout the ages of disputing no one has ever contended that divorce is not a sin, and, as far as I know, no one argues that now. It is a matter of universal agreement that God's intention is for **one man** to marry **one woman** and to remain so for life. Jesus said, "What God has joined together let not man put asunder." (Mat. 19:6). The disputes have generated around legislations which enlarge on this, human decrees which presume to prescribe the punishment for violators and say more on it than the Bible says.

The restoration movement which began in America around the turn of the 19th century, was characterized by a determination to restore the elements and usages of the New Testament church, limited precisely to that which can be found written in the Bible. It is not surprising then that medieval concepts of marriage and divorce law would be pretty much ignored and even openly challenged by some scholars of this frame of mind, and so it has been from the start.

Alexander Campbell, one of the earliest pioneers of the movement, wrote in the **Millennial Harbinger** a reply to questions that had been sent him concerning divorce and remarriage, and he answered in complete disregard for the basic tenets of tradition. Concerning a woman who had been deserted by her husband for unknown reasons, had obtained a divorce and had remarried, he wrote, "If in that matter she had actually erred, she is not now to be repudiated for that error any more than one who formerly was a slanderer or a persecutor, and has been brought to repentance and reformation, is now to be rejected for crimes committed before his conversion. And if the divorce was obtained after she became a disciple, in order to conform to the statutes of the state, with express reference to her marriage, it seems not to materially alter the case." (Vol. 5, page 72)

A footnote at the end of article says that Walter Scot happened to be there on a visit at that time, and that he expressed agreement with these views. Neither Campbell nor Scott seemed to subscribe to the "sacrament" idea, that marriage cannot be broken by human hands. It was recognized that the woman may have sinned, or "erred," but excommunication by the church was not seen as a cure for that sin nor was a life of celibacy thereafter. Campbell and Scott obviously felt that since the blood of Jesus had been applied, the sin was cleansed. "Repentance and reformation" did not consist in destroying the second marriage and living without a mate if the first one could not be recovered.

So the restoration movement did not begin by adopting the traditional concepts on this subject. During the rest of that century



very little was written further on the matter. There is evidence that some noted brethren did espouse the traditional position, some part of it at least. Probably so little was said about it because divorces were so rare at the time. But in the 20th century divorces started to become more common and occasion was provided for much more to be said on the subject.

As early as 1933 G.C. Brewer wrote a series of articles in the Gospel Advocate challenging several tenets of traditionalism, especially the idea of arbitrary action by the church against a couple with marital mistakes. A paragraph typical of what he said often was, "Let those who are insisting that this sister and her husband be put out of the fellowship answer these questions: If this sister should tell you that when she was baptized she did it for some earthly or temporal benefit, with the set intention in her heart of renouncing her baptism and ceasing to follow the Lord if these temporal benefits did not follow according to expectation, and then she later saw that such a baptism was not scriptural and that she was then baptized sincerely in obedience to God's word would you insist that her first baptism was scriptural and that the second was a farce? Of course you would not. But is not her case very similar?" (4/27/33, page 386 – she had said her earlier teenage marriage was not sincere).

A couple of paragraphs later he said, "Brethren must have a very anomalous idea of what it takes to honor Christ, save souls, and glorify God, if they imagine that they can take punitive action in a case like this. It would not correct any wrong that may exist. It would disrupt the church and alienate brethren and bring reproach on the cause and discourage and disgust young people. If some one or two insist that such action must be taken or else they will quit the church, that very threat is evidence that they are more interested in carrying their point and enforcing their idea than they are in saving these souls and honoring Christ. In enforcing the will of Christ, disciples cannot be arbitrary, dictatorial, and imperious. They must be full of meekness, long suffering, patience, and prayer." At this time the editor of the Advocate was the venerable Foy E. Wallace Jr. So it is

not surprising that articles of this type would appear. Some three decades later he expressed these same sentiments very strongly in his book, **Sermon on the Mount and the Civil State**. (Page 41).

Flaws in the case for traditional principles were seen by many brethren, but there were also some who accepted those fundamentals and wrote in defense of them. The most outspoken ones opposing the traditional view were G. C. Brewer, Foy Wallace Jr., L. R. Wilson, R. L. Whiteside, and Leslie G. Thomas. To try to create the impression that back in these times all respected leaders of the movement taught the traditional position, as some are now trying to do, is contrary to the facts of history. In fact, it may have been more nearly the other way around. At least L. R. Wilson thought so in 1939. That year his articles were challenged by Roy Lanier Sr. and a discussion ensued in the **Firm Foundation**. In his final paragraph Wilson said, "Let me repeat, we are not disagreed as to whether or not divorce and remarriage be wrong, but is it possible for those who have become guilty of such wrongs to be saved, without dissolving the second marriage? I contend that such IS possible; brother Lanier contends that it is impossible. He is following the stereotyped course. I have departed somewhat from that course of argument, but have contended that the course accepted by most preachers and practiced by most congregations is justifiable." (10/17/39, page 2).

Especially in the 30s, 40s, and 50s this seems to have been the case. Looking back through brotherhood literature one finds both sides amply represented in printed material. One aspect of the current dispute that was not present back then, is the open hostility and divisiveness. Noted brethren of past generations expressed themselves freely on both sides of the subject without fear of reprisal or excommunication, and apparently without undue passion. In many cases a viewpoint was expressed in print and it was a good while before there was any challenge of it. But somewhere around the early to middle 70s we began having brethren among us who are ready to "shoot" immediately at anything that moves.

In 1939 L. R. Wilson, who was a highly respected scholar of the Bible, wrote fully the position now held by this writer, in the **Firm Foundation**. (3/28/39, page 2). Question #4 concerned a couple who were both "guilty parties" and had contracted a remarriage. Wilson wrote, "They now see their mistake and genuinely regret it. But their former unions are broken. Certainly the breaking of the second union will not right the breaking of the first. And the breaking of the second union with the idea of restoring the first would be no better. As it appears to me the only thing that can be done is for both parties to repent of their wrongs, ask God to forgive them, and prove their repentance by being true to their present vows and the union they now have made. Two wrongs will not make one right."

In the concluding paragraph he set forth precisely the same principle as did Campbell. After stating that no one should suppose he would encourage anyone to commit this or any sin, he said, "But after men have been guilty of such sins I understand that God can and will forgive them, blot out their past completely, if and when they obey God's law of pardon. When this is done they stand on the same footing before God as any other Christian, and, as far as I know, have a right to do anything that any other Christian has a right to do. No man has a right to do anything that is wrong, but any man who commits a wrong, (other than blasphemy against the Holy Spirit) may be forgiven, and then stand on the same footing before God as any other person who was once a sinner and later forgiven."

Note again here that the wrongness of divorce was not questioned. The issue was not "Is it wrong?" The issue was "Can it be forgiven and cleansed by the blood of Christ, or is restitution or celibacy required before it can be forgiven?" The contention of all these men was that the "celibacy" procedure was based on traditional authority, not on Bible authority. They were right. Evidently in 1939 a good percentage of brethren saw it this way. Brother Wilson began his article of October 10 by saying, "I have been agreeably surprised at the number of commendations I have received regarding my

articles on divorce and remarriage. I have received but very few unfavorable criticisms." (Page 3).

One unfavorable criticism he did receive was from Roy Lanier Sr. and it occasioned a brief exchange of articles between them which was printed in the **Firm Foundation**. Lanier's name was later to figure prominently in our history as one of the most aggressive promoters of the traditional position and one of the reasons for that viewpoint rising to prominence among us.

Those who wrote in support of the traditional view almost always put forth the same premises as Catholic tradition, without realizing it. For example, in 1940 D. D. Woody's article in the **Gospel Advocate** set forth the idea that "do not put asunder" means "**cannot** put asunder," that a divorced and remarried couple are still married to their first mates in God's sight, not married to each other, are living in adultery, and that they cannot be right with God until they dissolve the marriage and embark on a life of celibacy. A typical paragraph reads, "Do divorced people have the right to remarry? In discussing this question we assume that the divorce was granted on the ground of fornication, for one CANNOT be divorced in God's sight on any other" (12/12/40 page 1183, Emphasis mine, O.H.).

In his conclusion another medieval concept is reflected, that physical punishment is a deterrent to sin. "Instead of endeavoring to make people think it is comparatively easy to escape from the consequences of adultery, we must endeavor to show them the seriousness of this sin and how difficult it may be for one to escape from its clutches." Later brethren would link this idea with the scripture, "The way of the transgressor is hard," and then argue that his way must continue to be hard even after he has repented and stopped transgressing.

One of the most notable proponents of traditional premises was H. Leo Boles. I have noticed that throughout history even the best minds have at least one blind spot. In 1945 Boles' article on "Repentance" in the **Advocate** shows that he had accepted much of

the "penance" concept and the "restitution" concept, in the name of "repentance." He wrote, "Still again, the fruits of repentance, or doing works worthy of repentance, lead one to restore and make good all that he has done that is evil, so far as is possible." (10/4/45, front page). The statement itself is not as far off course as is the application of it which creates a "law of restitution," essential to forgiveness. This premise became a basic cause of confusion later, especially in the 70s and 80s.

In the same year, 1945, Boles wrote a series of articles in the **Advocate** in which this extreme was reached on the matter of divorce and remarriage and the fundamental principles of Catholicism were amplified. This put the name of one of our foremost scholars behind those teachings. These articles were then printed in tract form and have been circulating over the brotherhood ever since, attaining almost a status of "standard" as regards this subject. It is sad to have to say of a man who was so powerful in other areas of the work of the Gospel and accomplished so many good things for the cause of Christ, that this particular series of articles compares much more favorably with the Catholic Encyclopedia than with the Bible.

Also in the mid 40s P. W. Stonestreet wrote some articles in the Gospel Advocate which opposed several tenets of traditionalism. E. C. Fuqua, editor of the Vindicator, affirmed that alien sinners are not required by God's word to account retroactively for sins against marriage committed before conversion. But the foundations of a big push for traditionalism were in place and a head of steam was being generated. Fuqua was challenged by Thomas Warren, then a young man, and they had a written debate, carried in the Vindicator. Warren, however, was already a specialist in Aristotelian "logic" and insisted on first interpreting what Fuqua said and then answering his interpretation of it instead of what had actually been said. Fuqua ran out of patience with him and, after repeated warnings, finally cut off the exchange because Warren would not deal with the actual issues. Warren then printed this exchange in a book, adding another

chapter on his own, along with an argumentative foreword in his favor by Roy Deaver, and called it the "Warren-Fuqua debate."

Here we find a vehemence not present before, a determination to drive this tradition down the throats of the brethren. Warren was later to become pretty much the "mainspring" behind the faction that has hammered away at the job of driving a wedge of division between brethren on this subject. With the publication of that book Warren pronounced the issue "settled."

It may be that W. W. Otey took notice of this attitude. In the same year he wrote in the Advocate, "Perhaps most preachers and writers have settled convictions in regard to divorce and remarriage - in THEORY shall I say?" He then expressed his opposition to it. He told of a young preacher who came to hold a meeting where brother Otey preached. One night a couple responded and were baptized. He said, "The next morning early, the young preacher, brother M, came to my home and said, Brother Otey, Brother C says the young woman who was baptized last night had married in the teens to a man who was more than twice her age, soon left him, was divorced, and is now married to the young man that was baptized last night. I replied, They are entire strangers to me, and I did not know that she had been divorced. M said, We must go and talk to them.' I said, What are you going to say to them? Well, we must talk to them,' he said. 'We must go and talk to them. "But,' I said, 'What are you going to say to them?' For the third time he said, "We must go and talk to them.' I replied with strong emphasis, "Tell me what we can say to them and I will go.' To this he had no answer and the visit was not made. Frankly, I did not know what we could say that would help the situation. Had we told them they must separate or have no church help in their spiritual life, and thus sent them back into the world, would have been taking more responsibility than I was then, or am now, willing to take." (8/16/45). Brother Goodpasture published this article on the editorial page without suggesting any better answer. This was the common thinking of the time. But forces were

at work and an element was forming which would later change this thinking drastically.

By 1950 it seems a formidable number of brethren were accepting the position advocated by brother Boles and now zealously pressed by Tom Warren and Roy Lanier Sr. and were starting to apply it locally. G. C. Brewer again wrote a lengthy article in the *Gospel Advocate* in reply to some questions. At the end he wrote, "The brother who submits these questions indicates that he is now where brethren have shown a lack of wisdom in dealing with some cases. As we have already indicated, there are cases where none of us are wise enough to know what to do, and to seek to undo some cases would be a mistake on the part of preachers and elders. There are things involved in the secret lives of people and in their relationships to each other that no outside person can understand, much less adjudicate. We would better teach people what the word of the Lord says and leave them to apply it to their own lives when questions are involved that are so intricate and so delicate that we cannot take hold of them." (12/21/50, Page 825).

In 1954 brother Brewer again wrote on the subject in the **Advocate**, openly denouncing some principles of "legalism" and introducing some very anti-traditional arguments. Here again it is indicated that some brethren were beginning to push too much and to go beyond propriety. Brother Brewer begins his answer to some questions by saying, "If it is the woman herself who is disturbed about this condition, then it is well that we do all we can to help her reach a conclusion and find peace of mind. If it is not the person involved but other brethren who are trying to tell this woman what she should do, then I think the matter should be dropped and these outsiders should realize that they have no responsibility in the matter." (Aug. 5, 1954, page 612).

Robertson L. Whiteside was highly respected among us as a Bible scholar. As "Queries Editor" of the **Advocate** he raised many thought provoking questions and made many non-traditional statements.

For instance, he wrote, "We usually have argued that as the apostles were the last and final revelators of the will of Christ, all that went before should be understood in the light of their teaching; but when we seek to bend First Corinthians to fit Matthew 19:9 we reverse the principle of interpretation." (**Reflections**, page 416). He also suggested that we ought to make a more careful comparison of our views with those of the apostles. For the complete statement on this turn back again to our **Introduction**. (Page 4).

These reservations brethren had back in those times about setting themselves up as judges and about binding human theories upon people, were gradually laid aside by a majority of brethren. By 1970 the basic principles of Catholic tradition were being thrust upon the brotherhood and judgments based on them were being made with reckless abandon.



# 3. The Controversy Within the Restoration Movement

## PART 2

In the late 1950s the very scholarly Leslie G. Thomas wrote his book, *Sermon on the Mount*. Two of its chapters clearly set forth a position contrary to the traditional view. The book was published by the Gospel Advocate Company under the editorship of B. C. Goodpasture. Knowing of the aggressive movement promoting traditionalism that had recently been generated, brother Thomas sent the manuscript for those two chapters to brother Goodpasture separately, and asked if he might want to delete them. But brother Goodpasture published the book in its entirety without comment.

In 1961 James D. Bales, one of the most prolific writers among us and an able Bible scholar, set forth his position opposing the traditional view, on the Abilene Christian College lectures. It was to be 18 more years however, before he would write the book "Not Under Bondage" and other smaller books on the divorce subject, and then become the chief target for outright persecution by the forces pushing the traditional position, many of whom had been close friends of his for many years.

By 1965 the level of interest in the divorce subject had apparently reached a pretty high point. Roy Lanier Sr. wrote a series of articles in the Firm Foundation that year, in which he espoused the traditional view, and very strongly so. Concerning response to it he later wrote, "My recent series of three articles on Marriage, Divorce, and the Preacher's Part in the Marriage Ceremony, stirred a lot of interest among our readers. I received more mail in response to these articles than any I have written in a long time. This indicates the interest people have in these subjects as compared with interest in many other subjects on which I have written." (4/27/65, page 265).

Brother Lanier also published a booklet on the subject in which he espoused all the basic traditions, the "indissolubility" of marriage, the requirement of physical penalties to retard sin, the "invalidity" of the second marriage after unscriptural divorce, and the idea that God still holds such a person bound to their first mate. On page 6 he said, "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 your first partner. God joined you to your first partner, but he refused to join you to this second partner." This booklet also was widely circulated and promoted as "standard." Lanier's writings have had a strong influence across the land toward getting the traditional position accepted. Before his death he also traveled and held workshops and preached the principles of traditionalism.

In 1966 the highly esteemed Gus Nichols spoke out and affirmed that the guilty party does have a right to remarry, but by this time the tendency to circulate only traditional material and suppress everything else was already strong. In an article in his small paper "Words of Truth" he quoted brother Bales with approval, and then gave this summary and conclusion: "In a word we are urging that the church not withdraw itself from a brother who commits fornication and is put away from his wife for that cause, but he later repents of his sin and is restored to the fellowship of the church, then later marries again just as the former wife has done. Why should the church fellowship her but withdraw from him? If he can't remarry, then why? He has no wife. The other fellow has her. Those who defend her marriage say she had a right to a second marriage on the ground that she was loosed from her first husband and was no more his wife than before she married the first time. If this is so, how could she be loosed from him like that, and he not also be loosed from her? Where is the scripture that teaches she is no longer his wife, but he is still her husband? Finally, if he repents and is restored, does the Lord forgive him? If so, is he still guilty after being forgiven so he cannot marry again? Or is he unforgiven? Is fornication the unpardonable sin? (1 Cor. 6:9 - 11)." (Page 3).

In earlier times when there was more objectivity this article probably would have done a lot of good. It is very insightful. But by this time the traditionalism steam roller had up enough steam that even such giants as Gus Nichols, G. C. Brewer, L. R. Wilson, Foy Wallace Jr., and J. D. Bales could not stem the tide of blind commitment to tradition that had developed in the church.

In 1967 Pat Harrell's book "Divorce and Remarriage in the Early Church" came out and provided well researched and documented evidence that the church prior to AD 325 did not require aliens to account retroactively for past marriage violations upon becoming Christians. The first result of the book was to get its author branded as a "liberal," but it did make available a wealth of information not heretofore generally known.

Also in 1967 Foy Wallace's book "Sermon on the Mount and the Civil State, contained this strong denunciation of such human judgments as were becoming common: "With no course of action legislated, revealed, or prescribed, we cannot make one without human legislation. The course of some preachers in demanding separations and the breaking up of family relations, and the refusal to even baptize certain ones, whose marriage status does not measure up to his standard of approval, is a presumptuous procedure. It reveals the tendency to displace God as the judge of us all and a preacher ascends to the bench." (Page 41). Near the end of the paragraph he said, "It is certain, however, that if the Lord Jesus Christ had intended a course of action in such cases, he would not have left it for preachers to prescribe but would have Himself legislated it."

On page 45 he added a further stern rebuke to the self-appointed judges. He mentioned something Paul wrote and said "and it should serve as a check to some marriage counselling preachers who are so readily disposed to break up marriage relationships that are not in conformity with their own immature opinions." Back again on page 41 he warned of a more broad based danger, saying that to establish a course of action on this matter without its being prescribed by the Lord, "would result in human legislation more far reaching in evil consequences than the moral effects of divorcement limited to the persons involved."

Just a few years later those "evil consequences" did come to pass as certain men achieved more and more power in the church and assumed the authority to make more and more decisions of a judicial nature. The next year Ira Rice began his paper, "Contending for the Faith," which was followed in rapid succession by other papers with similar purposes, which turned out to be the promotion and defense of brotherhood traditions and "purging" of any brother who offered resistance. The free and open-minded use of the scriptures envisioned by the pioneers rapidly faded out of practice.

In 1969 the "**Spiritual Sword**" was started and later "**Vigil**," "**The Defender**," and a host of such papers. Most of them were mailed out enmasse to members of the church all over the world, especially elders and preachers, paid for by one or more congregations. These all embraced the traditional position on divorce and remarriage, along with other dogma that had become "established." They literally flooded the brotherhood with arguments for their viewpoints while denying anyone the privilege of answering the arguments or even clarifying what the real issues were. Over a period of a few years this had the effect of making it appear that these viewpoints, including the traditional concept of divorce and remarriage, had always been the "standard" viewpoint in the church and any other view was a "heresy" of recent origin.

Remarkably, even the Gospel Advocate and Firm Foundation came under the influence of this bandwagon steam roller. At the time this book was originally written, 1981, the editors of both papers carried articles from the traditional side but refused to print a word from the non-traditional point of view.

By way of update: Later the Firm Foundation was purchased by men of that element and is totally in their camp now. The Gospel Advocate changed to a much more moderate editor and now is not lined up with that camp, although at the time this revised edition of our book goes forth, January 1997, we have yet to see any articles from this side of these issues in that paper. We hope eventually there will be.

Back in the 70s and 80s all these papers carried a virtual tirade of traditional articles and denied our requests to be heard on our own behalf. It seems incredible but a situation of such ignorance and misinformation came to exist among us that most church members thought the present dispute was a very recent thing, involving a doctrine that we had concocted in the past couple of decades. Indeed, in one of my debates in 1977 my opponent said, "This is a heresy that has grown up in the church in the last 15 years."

(Connally - Hicks debate, page 80). Many times I have been asked by a church member, "If the traditional position is wrong, why is it no one ever noticed it before?"

This reflects a pitiful ignorance of the facts and of our own history. But some of the papers have even so argued. Over two decades of airing one side constantly and suppressing the other side totally, has resulted in a situation where gross ignorance prevails. Too many do not even know of the writings of Brewer, Wallace, Wilson, Whiteside, Nichols, Bales, Thomas, or even Campbell on the subject. It is like an attempt at brain washing, to blot out the voices of many of the best scholars of the past and present, and to re-write history.

The basic restoration principle of a full and open hearing for every Bible question was all but destroyed in the time period covered in this chapter. Actually, in the late 80s one of these papers, "Contending for the Faith," began calling for a withdrawal of fellowship and open division over the issue of divorce and remarriage. The Spiritual Sword has been promoting that kind of thinking, though not stated explicitly. Under Reuel Lemmons the Firm Foundation carried an article by Rubel Shelly appealing to brethren not to divide over it. (1/6/81). But under its present editors that paper promotes just about the same positions as the other two. The Gospel Advocate also carried an article, this one by J. D. Thomas, asking brethren not to divide over this issue. (6/ 18/81). It seems a bit inconsistent to appeal against dividing and, at the same time, divide in theory and practice by allowing only one side of the issue to be heard. That is what was done in the 80s.

The truth is the rulings now being questioned on the divorce-remarriage subject have been disputed ever since their invention in the early church. In medieval times the questions were never settled because the hierarchy was able to "establish" its position with high handed methods and prevent a full comparison of its teachings with the text of scripture. Very similar procedures have been implemented in churches of Christ, with the same result. But in

recent years breakthroughs have occurred and communication has been restored. Now the facts are circulating among the people and more and more people are accepting them.

The premises behind the decrees of tradition are now clear. All who are willing to do so can take them to the Bible for testing. If we refuse to do that, we abandon the very essence of what the restoration movement is all about. It was no doubt in recognition of this fact that Foy E. Wallace Jr. wrote in a letter to J. D. Bales, "It is my feeling, brother Bales, that the church of Christ is facing the greatest, most serious doctrinal crisis since our existence on this American continent." (In "Shall We Splinter?" - Page 70)

# 4.

## What is Disputed, What is Not Disputed

Not all premises of the two general sides of the divorce - remarriage question are in conflict. There are several tenets, clearly stated in scripture, that are held in common by both sides. There is no need to belabor these since they are not in dispute.

### TENETS NOT DISPUTED

1. The wrongness of divorce.
2. The intended permanence of marriage.
3. The guilt of one who breaks a marriage.
4. Fornication the only scriptural ground for divorcing a mate.

But several tenets, basic to the traditional theory, have always been disputed and have yet to be established in scripture.



## TENETS THAT ARE DISPUTED

1. The "indissolubility" of marriage.
2. The non-existence of the second marriage. (In God's sight)
3. The efficacy of celibacy to right this wrong.
4. Repentance necessarily demands restitution if at all possible.
5. Physical penalties for sin necessary.

It is the view here that these premises are enlargements and go farther than the scriptures go. They are challenged on that ground, i.e. they do not have Bible authority. It is our view that the traditional theory of divorce-remarriage law cannot be sustained using the scriptures only, without these additional enlargements. It is axiomatic therefore, that to whatever extent these premises are found wanting for scriptural authority, to that same extent the traditional theory of divorce-remarriage law will be found wanting for scriptural authority, for they are one and the same in content.

It does not establish the traditional case to prove those premises which are not challenged, such as the fact that divorce is wrong, that God intends marriage to be life long, that fornication is the only scriptural ground for divorcing a mate, or that one who breaks a marriage becomes a sinner. These do not lack for scriptural authority and are therefore the judgments of God, not of men. They are not in dispute as far as I know.

Note that all five of the tenets which are challenged deal with our REACTION to the sin, not with prevention of it. That is another subject. Christians ought to give attention to it and it is not an area of dispute. Like any other sin, it should be taught as wrong and something that must not be done. Bible principles need to be taught that will help strengthen existing marriages and aid couples in

making their marriages permanent. Marriage Enrichment Seminars are good. They emphasize "Husbands love your wives" and "Wives reverence your husbands," and they motivate and instruct people in doing that. This is an area in which the church can do much good and should do so.

But when we come over into the area of the aftermath of the sin, judgment of it, what penalties must be applied, what "rights" are to be forfeited or not forfeited, etc. we then enter the arena of dispute. It is the arbitrary rulings of tradition in regard to this aspect of the problem that stand without Biblical sanction.

I do not know that any one person ever assembled together these five tenets and challenged them as a group, but every one of them has been challenged by some of the most respected scholars of our heritage. For example, #1, that marriage cannot be broken by one whose mate did not commit adultery. Gus Nichols wrote concerning a "guilty party," "If he can't remarry, then why? He has no wife. The other fellow has her. Those who defend her remarriage say she had a right to a second marriage on the ground she was loosed from her first husband and was no more his wife than before she married the first time. If this is so, how could she be loosed from him like that and he not also be loosed from her? Where is the scripture that teaches she is no longer his wife but he is still her husband?" (Words of Truth. 1/28/66, pg.3)

G. C. Brewer wrote, "His former marriage must be so completely undone as not to exist anymore as a marriage. That means that conditions are such that he and his wife are no longer husband and wife and could not be reconciled by a correction of the wrongs that had at first separated them. If this condition exists, then the man has no wife, even though it was his sin that destroyed the marriage." (Quoted in "Shall We Splinter?" pg. 14). Many other instances of scholarly challenge of the idea that man cannot break marriage except in a scriptural way, could be cited.

And #2, that in a case of unscriptural divorce and remarriage, the second "marriage" does not exist "in God's sight," for such a person CANNOT marry again.

E. E. Gibson wrote, "For Christians to arbitrarily decide and interpret scripture to teach that under certain conditions one or more of their fellows could not marry, regardless of the brother or sister's own wishes and needs, is radically silly and unreasonable." And again, "...but we have imagined that God has an arbitrary law which prohibits certain of our fellows from marriage and we set ourselves to enforce a prohibition on our brother or sister. Shame! Shame!" (Firm Foundation, 5/13/47, page 7).

Leslie G. Thomas wrote, "The husband and wife who married against God's will have become one flesh; for the scriptures plainly teach that God makes two people one who are joined together sexually, whether the woman be a harlot or one's lawfully wedded wife. (1 Cor. 6:16; Mat. 19:4-6). And again, "But where is the New Testament teaching, either by direct commandment, approved example which is applicable to the question now under consideration, or necessary inference, which requires a husband and wife to separate, even though their marriage should not have taken place?" (Gospel Advocate, 6/5/75, page 360).

Number 3, the idea that living celibately from now on will right this wrong.

L. R. Wilson wrote, "Certainly the breaking of the second union will not right the breaking of the first... Two wrongs will not make one right." (Firm Foundation, 3/28/39, pg. 2). Leslie G. Thomas wrote, "Living together or not living together, has nothing to do with the sin which they committed when they became husband and wife. Their sin has already been committed and a separation will not lighten the guilt." (Gospel Advocate, 6/5/75, page 353, 359).

Number 4, that repentance necessarily demands restitution if it is humanly possible.

Leslie G. Thomas wrote, "DOES REPENTANCE REQUIRE A SEPARATION? It must be admitted by all thoughtful Bible students that the New Testament furnishes neither precept nor example for such a course. ." (Sermon on the Mount, page 73).

W. W. Otey wrote, "Had we told them they must separate, or have no church help in their spiritual life, and thus sent them back into the world, would have been taking more responsibility than I was then, or am now, willing to take." (Gospel Advocate, Aug. 16, 1945 - Editorial page).

Number 5, That physical penalties are also required, in addition to the blood of Christ, to satisfy God's justice.

The apostle Paul wrote, "Now where remission of these is there is no more offering for sin." (Hebrews 10:18).

No doctrine has been more consistently taught or more strongly affirmed in the restoration movement than that sins are totally remitted at baptism, or at a prayer of repentance for the erring Christian, without additional acts of penance. Alexander Campbell wrote, "The apostles taught their disciples, or converts, that their sins were forgiven, and uniformly addressed them as pardoned or justified persons." (Mil. Harb. Vol. 1, Extra, Page 3).

C. C. Crawford wrote, "The demands of justice were met and satisfied more fully and more perfectly by Christ's offering of Himself for us, than if all the penalties of violated law had been inflicted upon the offending parties." (Survey of Christian Doctrine, page 85).

Lay aside the five tenets cited here and you lay aside the traditional theory of divorce-remarriage law. It cannot survive without them. Retain them and you stand in conflict with some of the most basic of restoration principles. But, most important of all, you stand in conflict with God's word, the scriptures.

Before we proceed to compare these tenets with the scriptures, let the reader be sure to understand clearly which premises are disputed and which ones are not disputed. If they are at all vague to you, please review them again and make sure they are clear in your mind. Then let us take out the "yardstick" of God's word and measure them carefully by that standard.

# 5.

## **Tenets of Tradition measured by the Bible Text**

I have always believed that two people can reach agreement on any Bible point if both will take exactly what the text says, adding nothing and deleting nothing. This is what I am determined to do. It is only with people who have a co-authority, such as "philosophy," that I have trouble reaching agreement.

In this case, measuring the premises behind the traditional view will require the analyzing of only one passage, Matthew 19:9, for it is on this verse that advocates of that position have built their whole case. This is the one they always cite when affirming any of those tenets.

In our debate Andrew Connally read this verse and said, "Now, I have built my whole case on it. I have repeated it half a dozen times in my first speech. I am willing to repeat it over and over again." (Page 227).

Roy Lanier Sr. in his booklet "Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage," wrote, "A correct understanding of one verse of scripture is essential to the solution of our problem." He then gave Matthew 19:9 and added, "This seems so clear and plain that no one should mistake the Lord's meaning, but the fact that there are a dozen different explanations is proof that some of us do not understand Him." (Page 25).

I believe that fact also proves that sometimes a person may enlarge on a text, or subtract from it, without realizing he is doing so. I find it helpful in studying a difficult or confusing passage, to take it one phrase at a time, or even one word at a time, if necessary, to be sure of getting exactly what it says. Unwarranted assumptions can go by unnoticed as long as we keep reading into a passage something that no words in the text say. Mat. 19:9 begins with the words, "And I say unto you..." Let's start right there and take it step by step, and determine from the words in the text what it was that Jesus said.

His first statement is. "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, " This is a simple statement about a hypothetical case in which a man puts away his wife for a reason other than fornication. Immediately we encounter a conflict here with a basic premise of tradition. Their concept is that if fornication is not the cause, it is not possible for a man to actually put away his wife "in the eyes of God. " But Jesus here speaks of a man who does it. If the traditionalists are right, then Jesus was wrong.

Roy Lanier Sr. wrote that the second marriage in such a case is an unholy union because "Divorce for any cause other than fornication does not destroy the union in God's sight." (Booklet, page 27). In debate both Jim Waldron and Andrew Connally, under the tutelage of Tom Warren and Roy Deaver, argued that premise. Waldron, for

example, said, "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." (Page 48). This is the traditional "sacrament" theory of marriage, that it is "indissoluble," precisely as defined by the Council of Trent, and attributed to what Jesus said in Matthew 19:9. But in the text we find that Jesus said the opposite. In His sight the man does put away his wife

Recently I asked a traditionalist preacher, "Do you believe that the man Jesus referred to here actually puts away his wife in God's sight?" He answered, "No. I believe he is still married to her in God's sight." I then asked, "Why? Which words in the text convey that idea?" It turned out his reasons for thinking that were more philosophical than textual. After some thought he finally said, "Well, I guess he does put her away, but not with God's approval." To which I replied, "Now that is exactly what the text says." It is strange but, as we said, a person who is used to reading a certain idea into a passage can read right over the text, adding something in or taking something out, and not realize it. But the word of God is set and will not change just because we carelessly mishandle it. In the judgment it will still say what it says now.

What we need to establish right here is whether the text says he puts her away or that he does not put her away. If we would reach agreement with each other, and more importantly, with God, we must restrain our philosophical interpretations until we have established what the text itself says. Building premature conclusions as to what is meant, is not reasonable. We must first establish what is said.

The word here translated "shall put away" is in the Greek "apoluse," aorist subjunctive form of the stem word "luo." Thayer defines it "To loose a person (or thing) tied or fastened." (Lexicon, page 384). So Jesus said that the man in this hypothetical case looses something that was tied or fastened, namely his wife. To say that the man in



such a case does not actually loose his wife, is simply to deny the statement of the text.

The next statement in the verse is, "and shall marry another." This is from "gameese," also aorist subjunctive, and means simply to marry. But tradition disagrees with this statement and again, one has to make a choice between the two. What word, or words, in the text convey the idea that he is simply living with a woman to whom he is not married? None. Does that idea come from the text then, or from human tradition?

We know what tradition says. Tertullian wrote, "A divorced woman is not able even to marry legitimately, and if she attempts sort of union, which is not marriage.... "But Jesus did not say "A union which is not marriage. " He said " ...shall marry another." He said this of a man who put away his wife, not for fornication. We know that Roy Lanier said, "God joined you to your first partner but He refused to join you to this second partner." But Jesus said, ...and shall marry another." Brother Lanier said the clear law of Mat. 19:9 "is not difficult to understand." I agree. But to me it is very difficult to understand the words "...and shall marry another" to mean "Does not marry another in God's sight."

Andrew Connally, coached in debate by Roy Deaver and Tom Warren, said, "If it is a civil ceremony and it is unscriptural, they are not married in God's sight." (Debate, page 73).

Again, I cannot reach agreement with those who simply refuse to accept the statement of the text. There is no question about the translation. The word "gameese" means "to marry, to take a wife." The problem is with the reader who brings preconceptions to the text and insists on imposing them.

The next phrase in the verse is, "commits adultery." Tradition also contradicts this. They say adultery is always a sex act and thus cannot be committed in the two acts of **putting away a wife** and **marrying another**. They reason therefore, that this man **will**

commit adultery later, when he cohabits with the woman, **after** marrying. This again is simply overruling the text. It would, in fact, overrule all passages in which the word "adultery" is used to refer to non-sexual things. For example, the Israelites "committed adultery with stones and trees." (Jer. 3:9). That could not be if "adultery" is always a sex act. Neither could it be true that those who were "seeking after a sign" were adulterous, as Mat. 12:39 says. "Friendship with the world" could not make people "adulterers and adulteresses," as James said it did. (James 4:4). Hosea 7:1-4 gives a list of unGodly things the people did. None are sexual. But verse 4 says, "They are all adulterers."

Is it any more reasonable to deny that adultery can be committed in divorcing and marrying another than it would be to deny that it can be committed in all these other ways given in scripture? The truth is Jesus stipulated two things the man in question does, **puts away a wife** and **marries another**. He, Jesus said, "commits adultery." There is no way we can blatantly deny that statement and be faithful to the text.

That they do deny this verse entirely was illustrated in my recent debate with Mac Deaver. (September 1995). My first written question to him on Monday night was, "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." (Debate, page 5).

In the "b" part of the verse the statement is, "Whoso marrieth her that is put away, doth commit adultery." This is denied in precisely the same way by tradition. It is their contention that one does not commit adultery in the act of marrying a put away woman, but rather in the later act of cohabiting with her sexually. The diagram on the next page shows their denial of this entire verse.

JESUS SAID	TRADITION SAYS
1. Whoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication....	1. It is not possible to put away a wife, except for fornication.
2. and shall marry another...	2. He does not actually marry the second wife in God's sight.
3. Commits adultery.	3. Adultery is not committed in divorcing & remarrying but in later sex acts.
4. Whoever marries a put away woman commits adultery.	4. The adultery is not in the marrying but in the sex activity that follows.

So, strange as it may seem, advocates of tradition wind up denying every statement made in their one and only proof text.

If anyone thinks their argument is based on the concept that a sex act is required to make it a marriage, let it be known that they no longer believe that. In our first debate they contended that "Marriage is covenant and cohabitation." (Waldron debate, page 186). But they changed their minds on it. Only two months later, at the Harding Preacher Forum in Searcy (April, 1977), Roy Deaver said in answer to a question that cohabitation is not required to make it a marriage. In our debate with Andrew Connally the same answer was given to a written question. (Page 364, Question 3). Very soon after the first debate the Spiritual Sword carried an article by Tom Warren in which he took the position I had taken in the Waldron debate and even used the same lines of argument, but he put his name to it.

So, by their own admission, when Jesus said that a man puts away his wife and "gets married" to another, He was not using a word that means to cohabit sexually.

Bear in mind that we are not contending that Jesus did not condemn these two actions, putting away a faithful wife to marry another. He said they constitute adultery, which, of course, is a sin. This is what we ought to teach today. But it is an entirely different doctrine to say that it is impossible for a man to break his marriage in an unscriptural way, impossible for him to marry another, and when he attempts to do these two things he does not commit adultery but begins "living in an adulterous relationship." Who said he is "living with one woman while bound to another?" Tertullian said so. The Council of Trent said so. Brother Lanier said so. But the text does not say so.

There is a huge difference between saying what Jesus said, "What God has joined together, let not man put asunder," and saying "What God has joined together man cannot put asunder." Saying it is wrong to do the thing is scriptural. Saying it is impossible is traditional and ends up being anti-scriptural.

Let the advocate of tradition prove the five tenets on which his position rests, 1. That marriage is unbreakable by human hands, 2. That the second marriage is not an actual marriage, 3. That living a celibate life will right this wrong, 4. That repentance demands restitution, and 5. That physical penalties are necessary to allay the guilt of sin. If these cannot be found in scripture then it is important that they be rejected forthwith, along with all the various rulings that are based on them.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ.  
- Colossians 2:8

But the prophet which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other Gods, even that prophet shall die.'

- Deuteronomy 18:20

# 6.

## Exactly What is God's Way?

We want it abundantly clear as to what we are advocating here. The Bible evidences we are presenting are not such as would convince anyone to approve sin. They are not intended to. We are not promoting any ideas of encouraging people to do wrong things. What we are promoting is basically a two fold proposition: 1. God must be the judge of us all and man must refrain from assuming that position, and 2. Grace does indeed apply to the sin of divorce. Any judgment rendered must be one that has God as its author, especially when it involves making extreme demands upon the lives of other people. When we say what God has said on a matter, we are not judging, but simply repeating the judgment God has given. But when we impose a ruling God has not given, then we are judging, and Christians simply must not do that.

Man's ways are not God's ways. (Isaiah 55:7-9). Particularly is this true when it comes to the handling of transgressions. This is what we are asking you to accept, the sovereignty of God, His exclusive position as the rightful judge of all mankind.

Saying that a certain sin can be forgiven by grace, even without restitution, is not the same as saying it isn't wrong in the first place. It is simply leaving the judging up to God. I would hate to think that I am responsible for the genuineness of the repentance of everyone I have led to Christ and baptized, or those I have received and assisted in a prayer of repentance. God does not hold us as personally guaranteeing the sincerity of every person we fellowship or offer to Him in obedience. The divine command is simply to teach, baptize, and teach, and to pray for one another as Christians.

We are not asking that sins be minimized, ignored, nor approved. We are asking that they be handled in accordance with the procedures that are stipulated in the word of God, not according to the legislations and judgments of men.

We acknowledge that the way of grace does lay itself open to those who might try to abuse it or take advantage of it. But God has not appointed us to protect Him, to be judges of that, nor to enact additional laws to prevent it. Let us be careful to "speak as the oracles of God," no more and no less.

Having learned about divorce, the sinfulness of it and the confusion it has caused through the years over how to handle it, let us now learn more fully how the Bible way of repentance and grace could totally annihilate this sin, even from those lives where it already exists.

Let's first be sure we know the meaning of these terms, "repentance" and " reformation of life," and "grace as well. Does the teaching of scripture differ from what the average human mind thinks of in connection with these terms? Doesn't repentance simply mean repentance and doesn't it convey the same idea to everyone? In

some respects this is true but in other ways it isn't. Over simplifying here can lead to rejecting some of the most imperative commands in the Bible. One thing is certain, if we are to understand what the righteousness of God is, we will have to accept the fact that it is revealed in the Gospel of Christ, not in human wisdom. (Romans 1:17). It does, in many ways, conflict with ordinary human concepts of justice. When God said that the wicked man who forsakes his way and returns to God will receive "mercy" and will be "pardoned," He then said, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways." (Isa. 55:7-9). In other words, when one who has done wrong repents and turns to the way of God, he will find a reception that is different to what is customary among men in cases of offense. The ways of men, even sincere men, are not necessarily the ways of God, particularly in the matter of righting wrongs.

In the 10th chapter of Romans Paul wrote that the Jews had missed the way of God in this very way. They had a "zeal for God," he said, "but not according to knowledge." Then he said, "For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God." (Vs. 1-3). What their problem was is clear. They had their ideas about what was right and wrong, and they applied these in the name of God, apparently not realizing that great differences exist between the thinking of God and the thinking of men. Their sincerity was not in question. Paul said, "I bear them record that they have a zeal of God." But he said it simply was "not according to knowledge."

Even conscientious men, who want to do what they see as right, can miss the way of God if they fail to learn what righteousness is from the teachings of the Bible. It is vitally important that we study the Bible concept of repentance and reformation of life, and keep in mind that huge differences may occur between what God says and what we think. This is an important first step, and one which the Jews, as a whole, never took, even though they had a zeal for God. Hostility against persons and defensiveness on behalf of a position should have no place among brethren. Righteousness is learned



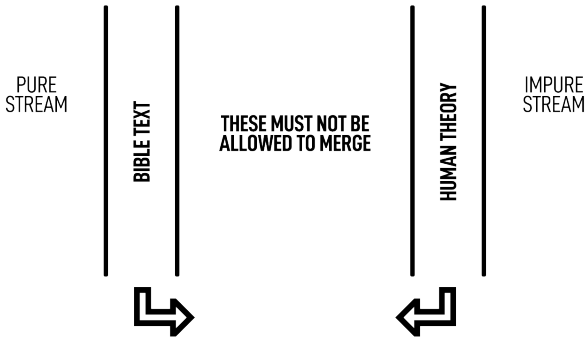
from a study of the word of God, not from any process of "philosophy," efforts to prove what is right by human "logic." Once we reach the point of realizing that differences do exist between the divine mind and the human mind, then we are in a position to start finding out what those differences are as they concern the subject at hand, and to learn to make decisions according to the righteousness of God, not according to human biases. Grace is a divine concept, not a human concept, and it does differ from man's ideas about justice.



# 7.

## How is Grace to be Applied?

It has long been accepted among us generally that, concerning religious doctrine, the stream is purest at a point nearest the fountain head, or source. The only totally pure stream, as we see it, is the scripture text. As the notions of men enter the stream, we say it has become corrupted. To the extent that the Bible text and human tradition become merged, the stream is polluted. What we have always tried to do is tum away the traditional "stream" and not allow it to influence the text or merge with it.



The only way to keep the stream pure is to keep it unmixed, undiluted, altered in any way. This has not been done in regard to the divorce - remarriage subject, and therein lies our problem.

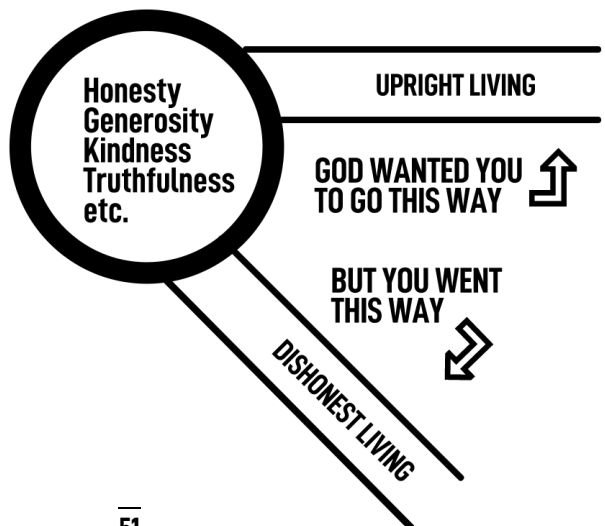
Think about another kind of sin, one on which the scriptural procedures have not been altered by tradition, at least not among us. Suppose a man who has been a criminal for 10 years, decides he wants to get things right with God and be a Christian. He has stolen, robbed, lied, and practiced all manner of deceit. But now he wants to know what it will take for him to be a Christian. What do I tell him?

First, I talk to him about God's ideal as compared with what he has been doing, and show him what the Bible says on the matter. I might draw a diagram for him like this:

### GOD'S IDEAL



I ask him if he accepts the fact that God wants him to be honest, generous, kind, truthful, etc. If he does, then I ask him if he sees the difference between that and what he has been doing.



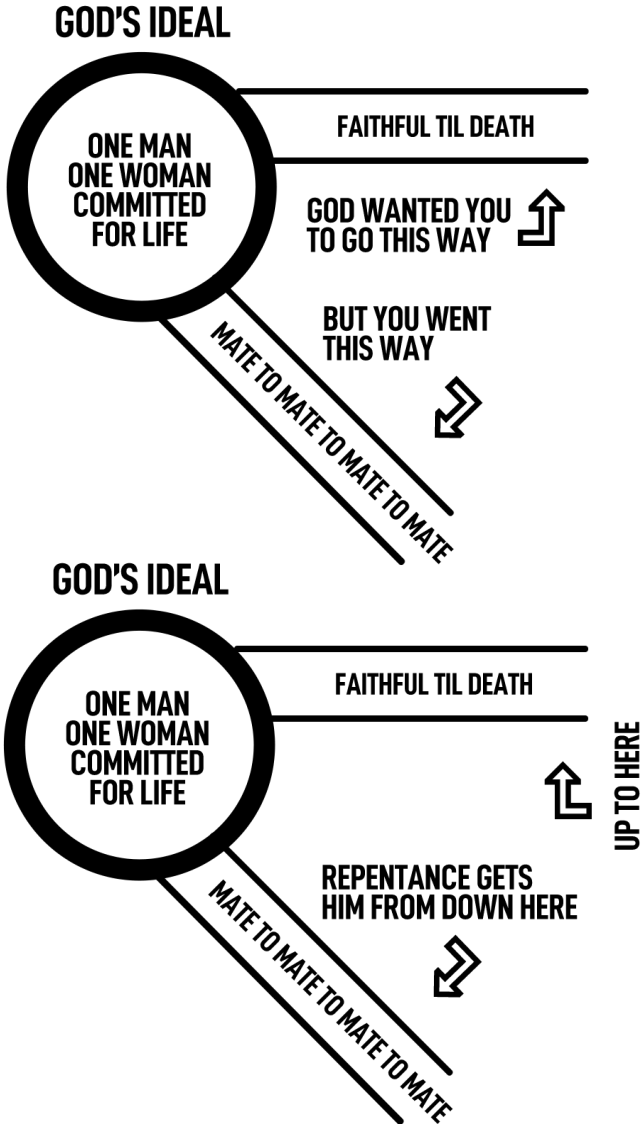
If he answers that he does see that, then my next question is, "Are you willing to change your mind about the matter and bring it into harmony with God's thinking? If he is, that is what the Bible calls "repentance." This is the divinely appointed method by which he is to get from where he is, on the wrong road, up to where God wants him to be, on the right road.



Suppose he says, "That's fine so far. But what do I do about the violations I have already committed over the past 10 years?" Now what do we tell him? I don't know about you but this is where I tell him about what grace is for and how it is purchased by the blood of Jesus. On this kind of sin most of us have no problem doing that because tradition has not stepped in and corrupted the text on it.

But if the man, instead of having been a criminal, is a divorcee, then too many of us do have profound problems with it. Tradition has

stepped into the text in that case and made a problem where there should be none. We ought to tell this man the same thing in principle that we told the criminal. First, we talk to him about God's ideal.



But what about the sins against marriage already committed in the past? What must be done about those? Well, what did we tell the criminal? Isn't this the point at which we clarify what the grace of God is for and take notice of the blood of Christ? Sins of the past are blotted out when that is applied. The only way it is made to be any different in this case is that the theories of tradition are allowed to step in and make it different. That simply must not happen.

The offender in either case cannot go back and live those years over again and change them. The Gospel does not require that. God Himself provided the payment for those sins with the sacrifice of His own Son on the cross. The case of the criminal offers no problem, even though thefts are not undone, murdered persons are not resurrected, lies remain told, and in general, restitution is not made. Tradition has not yet succeeded in changing Gods way of rectifying sins of the past as pertains to that kind of case. For those of us who refuse to accept the changes they have made concerning divorce cases, that is no problem either. We trust the blood of Jesus Christ to erase the sinner's past. Yes, the sinner must not repeat the sins, i.e. continue to go from mate to mate. But when he has changed his mind to the One man for One woman for life concept, and his life is now being lived that way, he is no longer willing to break marriage, he has repented as surely as the former thief who never steals again.

Man's problem with this is not usually because he doesn't want to do the right thing. He does. It's just that human ideas about what is the right thing differ from God's idea in this case. Instead of seeing the sin as being in the divorcing of one and marrying of another, as the text says, man sees it as being in the sexual activity that comes later. Thus, to him it appears that the sin is continuing in practice. A simple adjustment of mind to accept the fact that the sin is where Jesus said it is, in going from mate to mate, enables us to see that the sin has indeed been stopped. Changing what the sin consists of is one factor that muddies the water on this subject.

A second factor is looking upon the second marriage as not existing in God's sight. If we do that it appears that this man and woman are practicing sex outside of marriage. But again, that is a traditional idea, not a textual idea. If we accept the fact that they "marry," as Jesus said they do, even though they should not have, then we cease to see it as a non-marriage, adulterous relationship. As we said before, the separationist position absolutely requires the mixing in of these tradition, human theories. It cannot exist without them. If we say only what scripture says and do not add "The first marriage CANNOT be broken unscripturally, the second marriage is not actually a marriage in God's sight, and celibacy is the only course of action open to such offenders," then we have no reason to feel that we must handle divorce - remarriage cases any differently than other types of sin cases.

But someone says, "Why, people can abuse this and divorce and remarry as often as they want to, knowing that God will forgive them and let them start over again." Well, if they do shouldn't we let God handle that? Isn't the same true of other kinds of sin? What about the business of inviting criminals to become Christians and start a new life? Will that encourage people to live as criminals until they have had their fill, knowing that God will forgive them and let them start over? It is not a new thing to conflict with God in this way. The prodigal son's elder brother did exactly that. (Luke 15). Even the prodigal son himself thought in terms of human judgment, that he would return to his father's house as a servant and work his way back into acceptance, perhaps repay all the "substance" he had wasted on harlots and riotous living. But the way Jesus told it the father had an altogether different idea. He welcomed the son back with rejoicing, thankful that he had returned, and now thought of him as one who had been dead but was now alive again. The freeness of this welcome back and the celebration of it, irked the elder brother's sense of justice, and he made it known. But remember, Jesus told this story to illustrate what it is to "repent" (vs. 10), and to help us see how it is in the kingdom of God, which is the house of our Father.

If you have trouble accepting this fully, do not feel exclusive. Jesus seemed to know that the whole human race would have difficulty with it, so He told parable after parable to illustrate the same point. There is a lot of repetition on this because He knew it would conflict with our sense of "justice."

If you have been guilty of sinning against God's will in regard to marriage in the past, and you have trouble forgiving yourself, read the parables of Jesus over again until you get the message of them. For instance, Matthew 18:23-35, Matthew 20:1-6, and the one we just mentioned, Luke 15:11-32. Read John 8:3-11 in the King James version and see the difference between the way Jesus handled a case of adultery and the way the Pharisees wanted it handled. That same difference occurs today between the way our modern "Pharisees" want to handle the sin of divorce and what God's word says about it.

Many well-intentioned men have told you that your debt is not paid simply in appropriating the blood of Christ, that you must purge yourself from these sins by forfeiting all rights to marriage and a normal home and become "a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake." But now turn back to the pure word of God and study it, and learn again what the grace and mercy of God really means and why it is pictured in the Bible as such a tremendous gift from God to men.

L. R. Wilson pinpointed the issue precisely in the course of his discussion with Lanier. He wrote, "Let no one confuse the issue between us. It is not whether divorce is right or not. The issue is whether a divorced person who has contracted another marriage without scriptural grounds, can be saved without dissolving the second marriage bond. I think such is possible. Brother Lanier thinks it impossible. (Firm Foundation, 10/10/39 -- pg.3).

In the last paragraph he noted the perpetuation of the problem: "I rather think we have been trying to correct an evil by cutting it off at the top of the ground rather than going to the root of it.



The aim of the Gospel concerning any kind of sin has two general parts, 1. Soliciting repentance on the part of sinners so the practice is stopped, and 2. applying the blood of Jesus to the cleansing of the guilt of sin. This procedure, if applied effectively to the divorce problem, would eradicate it entirely. Add it up for yourself. If all who committed this sin were cleansed of it, how many divorcees would we have left? Exactly zero. If their minds were changed so they will not repeat the sin again, and all others who might do so in the future were taught not to do so, how many divorces would we have coming up? Exactly zero. Instead of retaining and perpetuating the problem, the Gospel proposes to eliminate it completely, in one fell stroke. And it will do it too... for those who accept and obey this Gospel, even if some "elder brothers" do raise objection.

There is an inherent conflict between human ideas of justice and God's plan of grace. This means that persons who want to follow the way of God in all things have to make a choice. That choice needs to be clear cut, not a mixture of the two. Grace, as set forth in the Bible, means that sins are atoned for by the blood of Christ, not paid for by human sacrificial payment. Human justice calls for payment by the guilty person. In the matter of divorce and remarriage sins the traditionalists reason that if a sentence of permanent celibacy is not imposed, the sin has not been adequately paid for and has no penalty at all. In debate my opponent said, "Why did the Lord even bring it up? If it be that your marriage is such that you can divorce and remarry, and continue in that state, and there is no loss concerning divorce and remarriage, why did the Lord even bring it up? If the guilty has the same right as the innocent in this situation, why did the Lord even bring it up?" (Connally, page 74). Mac Deaver, in our debate in September, 1995, said, "Brethren, there are sins that are committed for which you have to pay a price." (Page 102).

This reflects, of course, human concepts of justice and rejects the divine concept of grace. In this kind of reasoning any procedure that omits the physical payment due the sin, would be rejected and it would be said that it lets the sinner off too easy, that it will encourage

others to sin, and it will mean that sin is without consequence so that people can just commit it freely. This is a key flaw in the reasoning of traditionalists. Their idea that physical penalties must be harsh to retard sin keeps coming up in many things they say. But GRACE and the concept of PERSONAL PAYMENT for sin are opposites. If grace were omitted there certainly would be situations in life that have no answer and in which life just simply could not be restored to the purity and normalcy it once knew. But to omit grace is to discard the Bible, for it is all based on that.

It is not a question of anyone "having the right" to commit sin and get away with it. It is a matter of making our choice clear cut in this matter, not mixing some grace with some human justice. In the Bible the grace of God is always pictured as standing between the sinful deeds of the sinner and the freedom of the sinner. Until the sinner "forsakes his way," as God decreed, and returns to the Lord, his guilt remains regardless of what he does. But when he does forsake his way and return to the Lord, God does exactly what He said He would, receives him with mercy and pardon. Then he is as free from his sins as if they had never occurred at all.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he was writing to a church where moral corruption was occurring within and without. He knew this for he mentioned it several times. In chapter 5 he referred to the man who was cohabiting with his father's wife. In chapter 6 he gave a long list of sins, including adultery, and then said, "and such were some of you, but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (Verse 9-11). How then could he write such generalized statements of sweeping freedom as he did in chapter seven? At vs. 2 he said that "every man and every woman" there must be allowed to have a mate, "to avoid fornication." But what about those former "adulterers"? What about the man who "had his father's wife"? Do you mean they were free to have a marriage and a normal life? The apostle said, "every man and every woman." He did not tell them to

repeat the sins but he did instruct them as though the sins were completely gone.

At verses 10-11 he told the married to stay married, not to separate, or if they did, to remain single and be reconciled. This is what married people ought to do. It is addressed in the passage "**Unto the married.**" When it is applied that way it makes sense. But when it is misapplied "**Unto the divorced,**" it makes no sense at all. Divorced people have no mate to whom to be reconciled. Thus, this command was never given to divorced people in the Bible, only to the married. It is human tradition that tries to force it to apply to divorced people. Disaster is the result.

How could Paul instruct these people, among whom he knew there were "guilty parties," to let any who were "unmarried" marry? (Verses 8-9). His reason was, "for it is better to marry than to burn." At verses 27-28 there is another sweeping authorization. "Art thou loosed from a wife? Seek not a wife. But and if thou marry thou hast not sinned. " No question was raised about whether they were loosed for fornication or any other reason. The man "loosed from his wife" was simply told that he would not sin if he married. That is because, if you read Matthew 19:9 carefully, you find that "fornication" is given there as a condition for **divorcing**, not a condition for **marrying**. The only condition Paul gives for it being right to marry is that they be "unmarried," whether virgins, widowed, or loosed from a mate.

How could Paul say all these things in view of the sinful past of some of the Corinthians? The answer is that an application of grace stands between the sins of chapters five and six and the freedom of chapter seven. "And such were some of you, but you were washed..." Paul did not mix human concepts of justice in with the grace of God.

So the question then is not "Is any sin inconsequential and without penalty?" The question is, "Does the penalty continue to accrue to the sin **AFTER** it has been removed, cleansed by the blood of Christ?" Apparently the apostles had no problem with this question at all. We

would have none either if our choice between the two philosophies were more clear cut. Problems of this sort arose only after the pure stream of textual teaching was corrupted by the impure stream of human speculation.

L. R. Wilson wrote, "Let no man suppose that I would encourage divorce, any more than I would encourage drunkenness, lying, stealing, envying, etc. I oppose them all with all the vehemence I have. But, after men have been guilty of such sins I understand that God can and will forgive them, and blot out their past completely, if and when they obey God's law of pardon. When this is done they stand on the same footing before God as any other Christian and, so far as I know, have a right to do anything that any other Christian has a right to do. No man has a right to do anything that is wrong, but any man who commits a wrong, (other than blasphemy against the Holy Spirit) may be forgiven, and then stand on the same footing before God as any other person who was once a sinner and later forgiven." (Firm Foundation - 3/28/39, Page 2).

This, my brethren, is a basic part of the Gospel that was long ago challenged by paganism and has been a major ground of dispute ever since. It has not been settled in the intervening years because pagan concepts have not been fully and completely rejected by all involved in the disputes. It is to be hoped that our generation will do better. I would hate to think of facing Christ in the judgment, having rejected a principle so clearly taught in His word as this one, and especially having forcibly imposed that unbelief on others.

"I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel. Which is not another, but there be some that trouble you and would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

- Galatians 1:6-8

## 8.

# Clear Symptoms of Digression

The mistakes being made on the divorce-remarriage subject are really a symptom of deeper problems. We pointed out earlier that the traditional concept developed during a time when there was a loss of grip on the scriptures as the only authority standard. It prevails today in an element among us which has a similar weakness, an acceptance of human "logic" as a sort of co-authority with the Bible.

As we have just discussed, one very vital principle that has been seriously corrupted among them is grace. Undoubtedly, for many it will continue to be difficult for some time to become comfortable with this procedure, even after it is established as the Bible way. It is hard to dispel a concept that has been drilled into our minds for a long time. I once knew a former Catholic lady for whom it was difficult to get so she was comfortable reading the Bible. She had been taught since childhood that only clergymen had that right, that she did not. That's the way it is with deeply rooted mistakes. Often

the mind sees the truth long before the heart can accept it. The misconceptions about grace have been planted here for more than a generation.

These constitute a digression from Bible teaching of a very subtle sort. As with most such departures, the words of scripture continue to be used. It is the application that is changed. Here are three clearly stated New Testament principles that will alert us when a digression from the right way has occurred:

1.

### **SIMPLICITY BECOMES COMPLEXITY (2 COR. 11:3)**

Paul said he feared that the Corinthians might become corrupted from "the simplicity that is in Christ." The Bible way is not complicated. It is simple and sensible, designed for ordinary human minds. For example, application of the Gospel to divorce-remarriage situations in the first century was such a simple matter that it is not singled out for any specialized instructions. The uproar about it developed only after "church law" had gotten so complex that, as history says, "the technical abilities of a canon lawyer" came to be needed.

In 1981 a notable case of this kind turned up in the news. Ted Kennedy was trying to convince the pope that according to a technicality of canon law, he was never really married to his wife. A headline in the tabloid **GLOBE** read, "After 23 years and 3 children Teddy will plead, WE WERE NEVER WED." (6/16/81, page 9).

Ironically, traditional brethren among us have also discussed what technicalities in a given situation might justify declaring that a certain marriage "never existed in God's sight." This is not called a "divorce," it is called an "annulment." They seem to be more comfortable with such a legalistic justification than with grace.

Because of the omission of grace on this subject, many people have been pressured into lying about their conduct and their situation. I greatly fear for such souls. Instead of admitting their sins and being justified freely by the redemption that is in Christ, they try to justify themselves legalistically, disclaim any guilt, and fulfill a code of so called "canon law" which the apostles knew nothing of. That is a very bad course in any spiritual matter. The way of God is simple, **Let the wicked forsake his way and return to God and he will be pardoned.**

2.

## **ADDITIONAL PROCEDURES NOW REQUIRED**

Some congregations have found it necessary, when sending out missionaries, or personal workers into the community, to instruct them to first ask any interested prospects, "Have either of you ever been married before?" If they have, then they must ask, "Would you be willing to leave your present mate?" If they answer, "No," then you simply leave without offering them the Gospel.

The only explanation I can think of for how Peter could make the broad, all inclusive statement he did on Pentecost day, to a crowd of several thousand people, **WITHOUT** asking any question of that kind, is that the Gospel preached on that occasion did **NOT** require that it be asked. A gospel that requires it now is a different gospel. Peter said simply, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38).

In future years, as they went over the empire preaching the Gospel, that question never did become necessary. When we read the apostolic record and compare it with what is being said today, and we find that additional procedures are now required that were not required then, we know that a digression has occurred. In this case men are now preaching a "gospel" that, to be consistent, does require such a question to be asked before they can know that their

gospel can be offered to a given person. The fact that these congregations see that themselves, shows that they do recognize that as part of the content of their doctrine. Since the doctrine preached by the apostles DID NOT require it, the two are obviously not the same.

3.

### **A DOCTRINE IS EXPRESSLY IDENTIFIED IN THE BIBLE AS APOSTATE**

In 1 Tim. 4:1-3 the fact that this doctrine is apostate is not just hinted at, it is explicitly stated. This passage says that in the latter time some will depart from the faith and give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. In verse 3 the features of that apostate doctrine are given and the very first one is "forbidding to marry." It is specified by name! Forbidding divorce is Biblical. Jesus did that. Paul did that. But forbidding marriage is a different thing. It is not really divorce that traditionalists forbid. It is marriage itself. They accept a person divorced without scriptural cause, just so long as he does not marry. So it is marriage they forbid, and this countermands the most basic original command of God on the subject. No, this text is not speaking to priests and nuns. They are not really forbidden to marry, only while they are a priest or a nun. They can resign anytime they wish and marry. Many do so. But the people we're talking about cannot resign from anything and then marry. They are forbidden to ever marry anybody for the rest of their lives. That is what this text speaks to.

So when a doctrine is 1. More complex than what the apostles said, 2. Makes additional procedures necessary, and 3. Is specified in scripture, by name, as demonic in origin and a feature of the falling away from the faith, we know it is a wrong doctrine and is to be rejected by all sincere Christians. This is precisely the case with the traditional concept of divorce-remarriage law. If the apostles were alive today, they would say of this doctrine, **"WE GIVE NO SUCH COMMANDMENT."**



# 9. Why Did Moses Command a Bill of Divorcement?

When Jesus said, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder," (Mat. 19:6), the Pharisees immediately asked, "Why then, did Moses command to give a bill of divorcement and put her away?" This is a logical question. If God forbids divorce, why would He authorize a bill of divorcement? Jesus answered the question clearly but men have generally misunderstood His answer.

The Lord's reply was "Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses suffered you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so." (Vs. 8). The traditional notion has been that this means God wanted to give a law forbidding divorce but mankind was very stubborn and not willing to accept that so God sort of acquiesced to

that stubbornness and gave man a commandment more in line with what he was willing to accept. Many commentators say God "made a concession" in this case. J. W. McGarvey wrote that God "chose the lesser of two evils." This has been quoted in print, with approval, by some brethren who currently promote the traditional position.

It looks like they think God said, "I don't want you to divorce," but man said "We want to divorce," and God said, "Okay, have it your way, but I want you to know it is under protest." This is not in harmony with the sovereignty of God and the respect for His will that He has always required of man. Surely we can do better than this at understanding what Jesus said.

In the first place, Moses did not write anything that was contrary to the will of God. Look at what he wrote, in Deut. 24:1-4, and you will see that he did not write an approval of divorcing. That is the misunderstanding the Pharisees had. They thought the approving of the bill of divorcement constituted approval of the act of divorcing, or breaking marriage. The very point of Jesus' reply is that it did not. There is a difference between a **sale** and a **bill of sale**. There is a difference between a **marriage** and a **marriage license**, between a death and a death certificate, etc. We need to understand the same difference between a divorce or putting away, and the bill of divorcement, which is the paperwork. Moses did not authorize men to put away their wives. They were already doing that. He ordered that in the event it happens, the paperwork is to be done. That is why he began his statement with the expression "IF it comes to pass that..." This is a provisional command, providing for what is to be done next in the event that a marriage is being broken. It is not a "concession" to the sin of marriage breaking.

The phrase "hardness of your hearts," is not from "porosis," the Greek word for stubbornness and unwillingness to obey, used of Israel in Rom. 11:25. The word here in Mat. 19:8 is "skeros - kardia," a compound word from "skello," to dry, which signifies to be trying,

austere, calloused, and the word "kardia" which means heart. So it is an insensitive, unfeeling heart that is referred to.

It was their cruel hearted mistreatment of their wives that caused God to order the bill of divorcement through Moses. The cruelty was in the way it was done. When a wife was put away without the legal paper, she was ruined. Women had no legal rights. She could not get a job to support herself. According to Jewish law she could not marry another husband. So she was ruined. Many women to whom this was done turned to prostitution to survive. To relieve this situation for the women, God had Moses to order the bill of divorcement.

The purpose of that bill was stated by Josephus. "Let him in writing give assurance that he will never use her as his wife anymore; for by this means she may be at liberty to marry another husband, although before this bill of divorce be given, she is not to be permitted so to do." (4:8, 23).

Brethren greatly err when they think of the divorce certificate as the act of sin, the act of marriage breaking. This part was commanded by God. The divorce certificate is not what destroys a marriage. It is to a dead marriage what a funeral is to a corpse. The funeral does not kill the corpse. The funeral is held because the corpse is dead. It recognizes that fact. The divorce certificate does not kill the marriage. It recognizes the fact that a marriage is dead.

To think to hold a marriage intact after it is truly dead, just by refusing to get the divorce certificate, is like thinking we could keep life in a dead body just by refusing to have the funeral. Preachers and elders who hold this mistaken idea often give very bad advice, such as telling an abandoned person that they must not go to the courthouse and get the certificate of divorce, else they will be breaking the marriage. The one who destroys the relationship and refuses to repair it is the one who breaks the marriage. Refusing the certificate will not change the fact of whatever sins have been done.

God has never wanted people to do the things that jeopardize or destroy a marriage, any more than He wants people to kill. Jesus said in answer to the Pharisees, "from the beginning it was not so." God did not approve marriage breaking in Deut. 24, he had not approved it before that, and He has never approved it since. But when it does happen anyway, God says, "Do the paperwork." This enables the people involved to get on with their lives." ...then she may go and be another man's wife." (Deut. 24:2, KJV).

Today it is still a cruel and heartless thing to command a couple whose marriage is truly dead, to refuse the certificate that would give them freedom from it legally. It is sad, of course, when such things occur and contrary to the will of God. But in cases where it happens, the order to refuse to recognize it, to keep the corpse of a dead marriage around to tie up one or both parties so they cannot marry again, is a cruel, hard-hearted thing to do.

It creates the very thing God said in the beginning was "not good," i.e. that a person should be alone. (Gen. 2: 18). It denies what Jesus and Paul both said, that not every one can "contain" without marriage. It repudiates the fact expressly stated in scripture that "It is better to marry than to burn." It is an unrealistic course completely out of harmony with the way God has designed the human race, based on the confused notions coming down to us from the dark ages.

It is seen as very wrong simply by understanding why Moses commanded the bill of divorcement.

# 10.

## A Better Second Half

In the 1929 Rose Bowl football game California played Georgia Tech. In the first half of the game Roy Reigels, who played for California, had an interesting experience. It seems there was a fumble and Roy happened to be in the right place at the right time and caught the football. Thinking to make a score for his team he took off up field. But in his excitement he got confused and headed in the wrong direction! His own players were trying to catch him and stop him and the Georgia Tech players started to block out and run interference for him. Finally, one of his own team mates did catch him and got him turned around just in time to prevent his going into the wrong end zone. What an embarrassing mistake!

Half time came and they went into the locker room. Reigels sneaked over into a corner, sat down on a little stool, and dropped his head. He just knew the coach was going to come in and eat him up alive for doing such a dumbbell thing. But he was a wise coach and he didn't do that. Instead he came into the room, saw how bad this boy felt, and went over and put his hand on his shoulder and said quietly, "Son, this game isn't over yet." Then he went to the front and gave his pep talk, they planned their strategy for the second half, not mentioning the wrong way incident at all. They went back out onto the field and the story has it that Roy Reigels played a beautiful second half. No doubt this would not have happened if the coach had not applied the principles of what we call "grace."

Psychologists and counsellors say that the most traumatic experience in human life is the death of a mate, and the second most traumatic experience in life is the collapse of a marriage. There are exceptions, of course, as circumstances vary. I have known a few instances in which a surviving spouse did not seem to be grieved much if any. But this is rare. I have also known a few people to whom a divorce was little or no shock. But that too is rare. In about 99% of the cases, these two experiences do rank one and two, at the top of the list, in traumatic severity. It just hardly gets any rougher than this.

In 1978 there were 1, 128,000 divorces in the United States. It has topped a million every year since 1975. Since there are two people in each marriage, this means that something like two and a quarter million people go through this shocking experience every year! Over a period of 20 years that's over forty million people who have become divorcees.

The self-righteous legalist looks at this figure and clucks his tongue at what a sinning bunch of people we have become. But the compassionate Christian looks at it and grieves at what a suffering bunch of people we have become. Who has the better insight? Who is "passing by on the other side"?

I can sit in my office behind my desk and ponder what punishment these people deserve for what they have done. But that is to utterly fail to see the problem through the eyes of God like love and compassion. It is to fail to see what God sees. He sees sin there, sure, but He also sees broken, hurting people and lives in need of repair.

My vision might get better if instead I listen and watch as this lady, now about middle aged, recounts all the things she went through daily while trying to make a marriage work with an alcoholic husband, or the one whose husband was simply cruel and abusive. The dashing of the dreams of youth she had brought to the marriage, the shameful bruises she often carried from being battered, and the sickening ugliness of so many things about that part of her life.

Through a torrent of tears she tells about the final days. "We quarreled. Oh, how we quarreled! How we insulted each other! What things we accused each other of. Then finally, there was the court hearing and the issuing of the decree." Now, ready or not, she has to accept the brutal fact of total failure in life's most important relationship. "It's all over," she says. "Down the drain. Gone. All the beautiful dreams and hopes, just simply gone. No, he didn't commit adultery. The only "love" he could really accept was the bottle. (Or maybe his work). Probably it's all over for him too; his life I mean. Unless some Christian people might be able to extend to him an unbelievable degree of patience and help. That would be the only possible hope for him."

"And me? Well, I guess it's all over for me too, really. You see, I knew it would be terribly difficult to recover from this shock, get myself composed, and try for another start in life. But I thought maybe, with the help of some really great Christians who loved me and really wanted me to make it, eventually the scars would heal. I could make a better choice next time, maybe do better myself too, and still might wind up with a Christian home and family, and with everything the way God has always wanted it to be."

Then suddenly into her mind comes the memory of another painful experience, what those Christian friends had said to her. Her expression sobers, her chin is set defiantly, and she says, "The truth is, I don't need any of you! I don't need God! I don't need anybody! I want you all to just leave me alone and don't bother me anymore. I have plenty of friends outside the church!"

Then I knew what had happened. At the point in her life when everything was coming apart and she needed the love that God wants to extend to suffering sinners through His people, more than at any other time in her life; she got rejection and condemnation instead. Probably those brethren had no idea what they had done. They were just "doing their duty." but that was the problem. They

knew not what they did. They had a zeal for God but not according to knowledge.

How I wished there had been a Godly, compassionate woman from the church who could have taken this poor, suffering soul into her arms, something like a mother does her own child who is hurting, and maybe have said, "It's all right my child. This game is not over yet. God has some great things in store for your life yet, in the second half." How different the outcome might have been.

But before this can become common place, a lot of teaching will have to be done and a lot of pagan ideas expelled. More of us are going to have to be willing to "get our hands dirty" by getting down into the trenches where the battles are really being fought, and start helping folks to find the land of beginning again, the way of God more perfectly.

Strangely, if this woman had not married her first husband, just lived with him in constant fornication, folks would now be talking about how great it is that she has repented and is going to marry a Christian husband and get everything set up like God wants it to be. But making exactly that change and trying for precisely that goal, is ruled as "not repentance" because she did the right thing and married him. Brethren, that is ridiculous beyond belief.

The really sad part is, this is not fiction. It is being lived out in the lives of thousands of people around us every day. Yes, the divorce rate is alarming. Yes, we must work toward correcting this. But the situation does not call for the judgmentalism of the Pharisees. It needs the compassion and mercy of Christ, the love of God, the way the Bible teaches us to take it to people. That is the most powerful force available for annihilating sin and saving people from the sin. We must learn to love the sinner while hating the sin. May God help us to understand that and get started at the task. We have a tremendously big job before us.



# 11.

## The Case Summarized

Basically, our thesis in this book is that the Gospel of Christ is ideal, to get from where he is now to where God wants him to be. It is further that the process is not complicated for anyone to the extent that it requires the technical abilities of a "canon lawyer."

Mainly what makes it so simple is the fact that grace is its central feature. This is what eliminates any necessity of trying to unravel all the mix-ups, misdeeds, degrees of guilt or innocence, and the such like. In the grace system sins are not identified one by one and each given a punishment according to justice. The blood of Jesus Christ simply blots them all out, regardless of what they were. . "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." (Hebrews 8:12; 10:17).

It has been correctly said, **You cannot unscramble scrambled eggs**. Because of the cross you don't have to try. This is why the apostles could simply say to all the people, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38). There was no necessity of inquiring into what they had formerly done, or what the nature of their sins might have been. It was irrelevant because they were not going to unscramble them, they were going to bury them. It is this simplicity that explains why no examples ever occurred anywhere in the New Testament record of the apostles inquiring into the marital backgrounds of the people they preached to, to find out if they might be "living in adultery," or

to discover whether or not they had forfeited their eligibility to practice marriage. No such ideas came along until hundreds of years later.

This is not to say that any sin is not a serious thing. In fact, it is so serious that only the blood of Jesus can pay for it. Yes, the apostles faced up to the sins and misdeeds they encountered among people, including sins against marriage. For instance, concerning the man at Corinth who "had his father's wife," Paul said, "That is such fornication as is not even named among the Gentiles!" He told the brethren at Corinth to disassociate themselves from him until he repented.

But we do intend to say that human ways of dealing with sin differ from God's way and therefore cannot be in any wise effective in removing sin. God alone can do that and His word, the Bible, is the only divine prescription giving the procedures for it. No man or group of men have been authorized to set out what conditions any person must meet in order to be cleansed. These have already been stipulated, and very precisely so, by the Lord. They are not subject to change just because they might offend someone's sense of "justice" When man prescribes celibacy as a solution for the sin of marriage destruction, he is not consulting the divine prescription, he is simply following a rule that is based on what some men see as "just."

I believe responsible students of the Bible can agree on the basic meaning of the word "repentance," and the nature of its applications in scripture. Simply defined, it refers to man's escape from the dominance of evil. It contemplates a mind that was controlled by a lust to sin so that sinful actions resulted, but is now changed to a mind that has broken free and those lusts no longer control it and the sinful actions no longer result. This freedom is demonstrated in the fact that the person now chooses right courses instead of wrong ones.

It could be stated this way: Man proclaims his deliverance from the dominance and control of sin by the fruits of repentance. The changed course of life is not itself repentance. It is a RESULT of it, or a fruit. Repentance itself is the change of mind. In the Biblical concept of it the mind is shifted from the control of Satan to the control of God. The mind that formerly was out of harmony with the mind of God, and was producing actions in the life that were sinful, has now adjusted so that it thinks in harmony with the mind of God, and is now producing actions in that life that are right and good. This adjustment of the mind is what repentance is. I do not believe any capable student of the Bible will disagree with this.

But the changed behavior has to begin NOW. It cannot begin back in the past before the adjustment was made. Repentance does not enable a man to go back into the past and re-live some things and do them differently this time. We need to realize that atonement for the sins of the past is a different matter altogether. When a man says that "repentance must be such that it will make restitution, or pay up for the past misdeeds," he is confusing repentance with atonement.

It is sometimes true that repentance might RESULT in one's wanting to pay back a person he has wronged, or "restore four fold," as Zacchaeus had in mind to do. (Luke 19:8). But to make that a requirement and create an inflexible "law of restitution," and to incorporate that into the meaning of the word "repent," is to change its meaning and nullify the principles of grace.

The Gospel of grace includes commands that every one of us be forgiving toward each other, that we be long suffering in dealing with each other, on the same basis of grace that God applies in dealing with us. If God deals with us in terms of grace, and we are to deal with each other in terms of grace, where would a "law of restitution" apply? If it does not apply between God and men, and it does not apply between man and man, then where would it apply?

Note that we speak of a "law" of restitution, not a "principle" of restitution. The latter would apply in the mind of a person who wants to restore something because of the good it would bring to the person to whom it is restored, or because it would be the right thing to do and consistent with the fact that he has repented. But to make it a binding law and require it in all cases, even those where untold misery and harm would be done to one or both of the parties involved, is to seriously misunderstand the meaning the Bible gives to the word.

Repentance is not designed to "square the debt." It is designed to change the practice or behavior of the person and to change the loyalty of the person from wrong to right. There is only one thing in the universe that can pay the sin debt and that is the blood of Jesus Christ. This does not mean that repentance is unimportant or that it does not have to be genuine. It is absolutely essential that it must be genuine. But let's see the design and purpose of repentance, how it functions, as God sees it, and not try to force repentance to serve a purpose God never assigned to it.

Repentance cannot reach into the past and erase it. The blood of Christ can do that for those who repent. In fact, that erasure is so complete that the person who repents and from this point on does the things God's word sets forth as right, will never again need to worry about those deeds of the past.

The prophet Jeremiah predicted that this would be the nature of the new covenant of God. "I will put my laws in their hearts and write them in their minds.... I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more." (Jer. 31:33-34). Paul quoted this prediction in Hebrews 10 and then added at verse 18, "Now where remission of these is there is no more offering to sin."

In other words, when you have repented, changed your behavior, and have appropriated the blood of Christ, there is nothing else to be done in reference to those sins. The person who trusts these promises of God and puts his confidence in the redeemer to free him

from his sins, will not be disappointed. But the person who puts his trust in the statutes of men to rectify his past, very likely will end up disappointed. Setting aside the atonement offered in the Gospel in favor of human concepts of law, is a very serious error. "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." (Matthew 15:9).

## WHAT GOD HATH PROMISED

God hath not promised, skies always blue,  
 Flower strewn pathways, all our lives through.  
 God hath not promised, sun without rain,  
 Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.  
 But God hath promised, strength for the day,  
 rest for the labor, light for the way,  
 Grace for the trials, help from above,  
 Unfailing sympathy, undying love.

But if you had known what that meaneth, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice," you would not have condemned the guiltless.

- **JESUS** (Matthew 12:7)

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